

Words that Help: Affirmations for any age,
every stage

WORDS THAT HELP: AFFIRMATIONS FOR ANY
AGE, EVERY STAGE

JEAN ILLSLEY CLARKE

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To Dick Clarke, my lifemate, who first said, "Give us words," and then stayed for the whole journey.

*"We all want to be good parents," he said, "but we don't know how.
Put words in our mouths." — R. Clarke*

Dear Readers,

Welcome to this life story about Developmental Affirmations.

Developmental Affirmations are short messages designed to help people learn important life lessons at each developmental stage, pre-birth to end of life. For example, an affirmation to an infant is, *"I love you and care for you willingly."* An example of an affirmation for someone at the end of their life is, *"You can celebrate the gifts you have received and the gifts you have given."*

There was no one place where all of the information about the Developmental Affirmations had been collected. This document, written in a question-and-answer format, is now that place. The questions are ones that both newcomers and experienced users of these affirmations have asked. The answers come from years of experience with the design and use of the messages by many people.

For each question, there is a "quick" answer and a "digging deeper" answer. A sample affirmation directly related to the question follows each of the quick answers. Some of the "Digging Deeper" answers are excerpts from WE, a newsletter that I wrote during many years the affirmations were being identified and tested.

The contents of the Q & A can be easily accessed by parent educators, other professionals, and anyone who wants information about the affirmations. The Q & A is neither a parenting course, nor is it a workshop model. However, leaders who wish to teach about the affirmations directly or use them to support and enhance any parenting course or adult growth-enhancing activity will find the background information on the Developmental Affirmations here.

You can select specific questions and their answers, or you can read the whole document for the entire story.

Enjoy the story.

Jean Illsley Clarke Ph.D.

PART I.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AFFIRMATIONS

QUESTION 1.

WHAT ARE THE DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS?



Developmental Affirmations are positive messages that support health and growth. They can be given from one person to another, or they can be given to you by yourself. Developmental Affirmations are specifically worded messages designed to support:

1. The learning of tasks that are important for the development of each specific age group in order to build capability, confidence, and resilience at every age.
2. Making healthy life decisions throughout the life span.

They can be given in any form, including spoken, facial and body expressions, touch, tone of voice, and/or body posture.

The goal of the Affirmation Project is to identify easily understood, quotable, positive, respectful, invitational messages to support growth at each stage of life.



You can
know what
you need
and ask
for help.

You can know what you need and ask for help.

Thinking – Stage 3

DIGGING DEEPER: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS

The Developmental Affirmations include permissions to grow, reminders of inborn capabilities, and assertions of love and support. For each developmental stage, the affirmations focus on jobs and attitudes that are central to growth at that age. The exact words are bare bone messages that can be used as stated or can be shaped to fit the situation. You may think of them as a platform on which you can turn words into actions. The developmental stages are described in Question 17: What are the developmental stages of growing up? These stages are based on Eric Erikson's theories about the stages of growth.

QUESTION 2.

WHERE CAN I FIND A LIST OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS?



Here is the entire list of the Developmental Affirmations grouped by developmental stages.

[Click here to download a handout of the Developmental Affirmations.](#)

Becoming, prenatal stage (peach)

- I celebrate that you are alive.
 - Your needs and safety are important to me.
 - We are connected and you are whole.
 - You can make healthy decisions about your experiences.
 - You can be born when you are ready.
 - Your life is your own.
- ♥ I love you just as you are.

Being, Stage 1, 0 to 6 months (red)

- I'm glad you are alive.
- You belong here.
- What you need is important to me.
- I'm glad you are you.
- You can grow at your own pace.
- You can feel all of your feelings.

♥ I love you and I care for you willingly.

Doing, Stage 2, 6 to 18 months (orange)

- You can explore and experiment and I will support and protect you.
- You can use all of your senses when you explore.
- You can do things as many times as you need to.
- You can know what you know.
- You can be interested in everything.
- I like to watch you initiate and grow and learn.

♥ I love you when you are active and when you are quiet.

Thinking, Stage 3, 18 months to 3 years (yellow)

- I'm glad you are starting to think for yourself.
- It's okay for you to be angry and I won't let you hurt yourself or others.
- You can say no and push and test limits as much as you need to.
- You can learn to think for yourself and I will think for myself.
- You can think and feel at the same time.
- You can know what you need and ask for help.

♥ You can become separate from me and I will continue to love you.

Identify and Power, Stage 4, 3 to 6 years (green)

- You can explore who you are and find out who other people are.

- You can be powerful and ask for help at the same time.
- You can try out different roles and ways of being powerful.
- You can find out the results of your behavior.
- All of your feelings are okay with me.
- You can learn what is pretend and what is real.

♥ I love who you are.

Structure, Stage 5, 6 to 12 years (light blue)

- You can think before you say yes or no and learn from your mistakes.
- You can trust your intuition to help you decide what to do.
- You can find a way of doing things that works for you.
- You can learn the rules that help you live with others.
- You can learn when and how to disagree.
- You can think for yourself and get help instead of staying in distress.

♥ I love you even when we differ; I love growing with you.

Identity, Sexuality and Separation, Stage 6, adolescence (dark blue)

- You can know who you are and learn and practice skills for independence.
- You can learn the difference between sex and nurturing, and be responsible for your needs and behavior.
- You can develop your own interests, relationships and causes.
- You can learn to use old skills in new ways.
- You can grow in your maleness and femaleness and still be dependent at times.
- I look forward to knowing you as an adult.

♥ My love is always with you. I trust you to ask for my support.

Interdependence, Stage 7, adult years (violet/purple)

- Your needs are important.

- You can be uniquely yourself and honor the uniqueness of others.
- You can be independent and interdependent.
- Through the years you can expand your commitments to your own growth, to your family, your friends, your community and to all humankind.
- You can build and examine your commitments to your values and causes, your roles and tasks.
- You can be responsible for your contributions to each of your commitments.
- You can be creative, competent, productive and joyful.
- You can trust your inner wisdom.
- You can say your hellos and goodbyes to people, roles, dreams and decisions.
- You can finish each part of your journey and look forward to the next.
- Your love matures and expands.

♥ You are lovable at every age.

<p>Integration, <i>preparing for death stage (white)</i></p>

- You can grow your whole life through.
- You can look upon your journey through life's stages as natural transitions.
- You can integrate all of your life experiences and die when you are ready.
- You can celebrate the gifts you have received and the gifts you have given.
- You deserve the support that you need.
- You can share your wisdom in your way.

♥ You are lovable just the way you are.



I like to watch you initiate and grow and learn.
Doing – Stage 2

DIGGING DEEPER: LEARN MORE ABOUT THE STAGES.

The affirmations were developed in sets to respond to the tasks required of a person transitioning through each stage. Each set of affirmations is a special set of permissions to grow. If a particular set sounds especially important to you, you may be revisiting those tasks. Parents often revisit the tasks their children are learning.

There are nine sets of affirmations, with each set corresponding to a stage. However, because for many years the conventional wisdom recognized seven stages, we have left the stages numbered one through seven (birth through adulthood) as we are accustomed to seeing them. Since current brain research indicates that the prenatal months are, in fact, a very busy stage, we add the “**Becoming**” stage. Also, since great numbers of people are now living to be young-old, old, and old-old, we added the last stage, the “**Integration**” stage. That makes nine stages in all.

QUESTION 3.

WHAT ARE THE COLORED AFFIRMATION OVALS?

The Developmental Affirmation ovals are color-coded oval-shaped discs with a developmental affirmation printed on each one. Why oval? The oval is a symbol of constantly renewing life and of hope. The sequence of colors reflects the rainbow to remind us that moving through the developmental stages is a natural and sequential process. There is a different color associated with each set of developmental learnings.

[Click here to download a handout of the Affirmation Ovals.](#)



IDENTITY & POWER

You can explore who you are and find out who other people are.

You can be powerful and ask for help at the same time.

You can try out different roles and ways of being powerful.

You can find out the results of your behavior.

All of your feelings are OK with me.

You can learn what is pretend and what is real.

I love who you are.

STRUCTURE

You can think before you say yes or no and learn from your mistakes.

You can trust your intuition to help you decide what to do.

You can find a way of doing things that works for you.

You can learn the rules that help you live with others.

You can learn when and how to disagree.

You can think for yourself and get help instead of staying in distress.

I love you even when we differ; I love growing with you.

IDENTITY SEXUALITY & SEPARATION

You can know who you are and learn and practice skills for independence.

You can learn the difference between sex and nurturing and be responsible for your needs and behavior.

You can develop your own interests, relationships and causes.

You can learn to use old skills in new ways.

You can grow in your maleness or femaleness and still be dependent at times.

I look forward to knowing you as an adult.

My love is always with you. I trust you to ask for my support.

INTERDEPENDENCE

Your needs are important.
Adult

You can be uniquely yourself and honor the uniqueness of others.
Adult

You can be independent and interdependent.
Adult

Through the years you can expand your commitments to your own growth, to your family, your friends, your community and to all humankind.
Adult

You can build and examine your commitments to your values and causes, your roles and your tasks.
Adult

You can be responsible for your contributions to each of your commitments.
Adult

Adult

You can be creative, competent, productive and joyful.

You can trust your inner wisdom.

You can say your hellos and goodbyes to people, roles, dreams and decisions.

You can finish each part of your journey and look forward to the next.

Your love matures and expands.

You are lovable at every age.

INTEGRATION

You can grow your whole life through.

You can look upon your journey through life's stages as natural transitions.

You can integrate all of your life experiences and die when you are ready.

You can celebrate the gifts you have received and the gifts you have given.

You deserve the support that you need.

You can share your wisdom in your way.

You are lovable just the way you are.



**You can finish each part of your journey
and look forward to the next.**

Interdependence – Stage 7

DIGGING DEEPER: LEARN MORE ABOUT THE COLORS.

The sets start with the color peach for the prenatal stage Becoming Stage, followed by Stages 1 through 7 which are arranged like the rainbow:

1. Being: Red
2. Doing: Orange
3. Thinking: Yellow
4. Power and Identity: Green
5. Structure: Light Blue
6. Identity, Sexuality, Separation: Dark Blue
7. Interdependence: Purple

There are seven affirmations in each set except Interdependence. The Interdependence Stage, which is the adult stage of growing (the 12 violet colored ovals), is the longest, as there are many developmental tasks to be covered. Grown-ups not only recycle earlier skills, but they also have complex adult skills to learn and use. The adult years present a variety of ever-expanding challenges and opportunities for growth. Since people need the Developmental Affirmations for their age plus all earlier sets, adults need the entire set of the rainbow of colors.

The white Integration stage, old age, or preparing for death, has no age designation as it can happen at any age. This stage may use many years as old people age through the experiences of the young-old, the old, and the old-old.

QUESTION 4.

WHO ARE THE AFFIRMATIONS FOR?



All people. All ages.

The Developmental Affirmations are designed for use across the entire lifespan — from prenatal to end of life. They also cross ethnic and cultural lines as we have been sent translations of the affirmations by clergy, therapists, coaches, educators, and people who just find the affirmations helpful who are using them in: Russian, Spanish, Chinese, Romanian, German, Austrian, Swedish, Italian, Czech, Icelandic, Swahili, and Japanese.

What you
need is
important
to me.

What you need is important to me.

Being – Stage 1

DIGGING DEEPER: MORE EXAMPLES.

Affirmations are helpful for parents who want to parent differently than they were parented. They also provide support for those whose parenting was helpful. Developmental Affirmations are

especially supportive for people who are in stressful situations. Parent educators have used these affirmations with babies, children, adolescents, young adults, middle-aged adults, and the elderly. Developmental Affirmations are used in homes, schools, colleges, social service organizations, religious organizations, half-way houses, prisons, and treatment centers.

QUESTION 5.

WHY WOULD I WANT TO USE THEM?



These affirmations are life-supporting messages that give people hope and direction for growth and health. The Developmental Affirmations help support people of all ages navigate the learning of developmental tasks that are significant at each stage of life.

- They can help us care for others and ourselves.
- They can help build the foundation for both adults and children to make effective decisions about life.
- They can help repair aspects of growth that were not well done the first time around.
- They can offer adults a chance to evaluate old decisions and make some new ones.
- They can remind parents and others to provide an environment that supports both children and adults in making these life-supporting decisions.
- Affirmations are especially helpful for people who are going through periods of stress and uncertainty such as grief, job changes, developmental shifts, marriage, divorce or a new baby.



You can be interested in everything.
Doing – Stage 2

DIGGING DEEPER: ADDITIONAL AREAS OF HEALTH AND HOPE.

Any of us can draw strengths from the affirmations, especially those of us from family systems where the nurturing was uneven, families where substances were misused and/or children were neglected or abused. For those who are recovering from deficits in growing up, these affirmations offer a roadmap to recovery. For those who experienced hostility, rejection, or violence while growing up, these affirmations help one to learn about a childhood environment that would have been healthier. It's never too late to heal those early wounds. The decisions we made about ourselves are lodged within our control. We can change them. We are in charge. We can use these affirmations to help us do that.

Incorporating these messages into our lives helps us raise our self-esteem and strengthen our internal core to improve our health. People reported that as they came to accept the affirmations on deeper and deeper levels, they became more productive, attractive, loving and joyful.

PART II.

**HOW TO USE THE DEVELOPMENTAL
AFFIRMATIONS**

QUESTION 6.

HOW ARE THE DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS USED?



You can offer them directly to give support to children and to yourself by saying them, singing them, posting them, making games with them. You give them by the way you speak, touch, look, respond to, spend time with, interact with and pay attention to people. You can do the activities found in Question 7: Can I do activities with the Developmental Affirmations?

You can
find a way of
doing things
that works
for you.

You can find a way of doing things that works for you.

Structure – Stage 5

DIGGING DEEPER: MORE OPTIONS.

The Developmental Affirmations can remind you to provide, as well as you can, an environment in which children and adults can decide to trust themselves and you. You can use the affirmations to help you think about what you really want for your child or for people of any age. You can write the Developmental Affirmations on your own cards, or print them out as a handout list or bookmarks. You can also purchase them as colored affirmation ovals cards.

QUESTION 7.

CAN I DO ACTIVITIES WITH THE DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS?



Oh yes! You can invent activities and games that fit the ages and stages of the people you are with. The book “139 Ways to Use Affirmations” by Jean Illsley Clarke and Carole Gesme, offers activities for many ages and purposes.



You can be creative, competent, productive, and joyful.
Interdependence – Stage 7

DIGGING DEEPER: VIEW THE BOOK 139 WAYS TO USE AFFIRMATIONS.

[Click here to download a PDF of the book.](#)

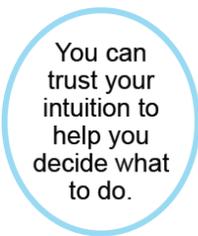
In this book you will see a wide variety of activities that use the Affirmations. You can [purchase colored punch out ovals](#). You can make your own ovals by printing out the [Affirmation Bookmarks](#) on firm white paper or on rainbow colored paper and cutting them up.

QUESTION 8.

DO I HAVE TO USE THE EXACT WORDS OF THE AFFIRMATIONS?



Use the exact words if you want to. Or use words that give the exact same meaning. Just remember to present the affirmations as offerings and suggestions. Affirmations are prompts and guides, not obligations or “shoulds.” Keep in mind that people learn more from your facial expression and tone of voice than from words. If you say loving words and your face is angry or doubting, children tend to believe the emotional affect rather than the words.



You can trust your intuition to help you decide what to do.

Structure – Stage 5

DIGGING DEEPER: MORE SUGGESTIONS.

Keep your affirmations positive with no ifs, buts, whens, or other limitations. “I love you when you are good” is conditional and depends on whether or not you please me. “I love you, and I care for you willingly” is positive and unconditional.

Suggestions from users:

- Try rewriting the affirmations. That helped us understand them, and my kids helped me put them into their words.
- Sometimes I say them to myself and then try to act that way.
- If my teenagers resist the exact words, I say, “That is my wish for you. How would you say it in your words?”
- People have reported, “I find some of the words stilted, so I try to internalize the intent and feelings behind the words and just let them flow out.”
- They can be rewritten for a specific purpose. For an example, see Diane Wagendahl’s [Affirmations Educators Can Offer Parents and Caregivers](#).

QUESTION 9.

CAN I USE THEM FOR MYSELF?



Yes. They are all healthy messages. Use them in any way they are helpful to you.



You can try out different roles and ways of being powerful.

Identity and Power – Stage 4

DIGGING DEEPER: MORE WAYS TO USE AFFIRMATIONS FOR YOURSELF.

Pick out one to four messages you want to give yourself.

- Carry them in your purse or wallet, or on your cell phone, and read them often.
- Put one on the dashboard of your car.
- Carry them in your pocket.
- Tell a trusted, nonjudgmental friend about them and how they will make life better. Focus on the present and the future. Let the past be the past.

- Talk with other people who are exploring the affirmations and get ideas from them.
- Sing them.
- Journal about them.
- Turn them into a dance.
- Practice reading them out loud to help yourself by hearing them. One dad read them out loud to his dachshund for many days. Only when he became comfortable hearing them in his own voice did he offer them to his family.

QUESTION 10.

CAN I WRITE MY OWN AFFIRMATIONS?



Write whatever you need to hear. A woman who is always too busy added a permission to an affirmation. She changed, “You can be interested in everything” to, “You can be interested in everything, and you don’t have to do everything.” Just be sure to keep your affirmations positive with no “buts” or “ifs” or “whens.”

You can think for yourself and get help instead of staying in distress.

You can think for yourself and get help instead of staying in distress.
Structure – Stage 5

DIGGING DEEPER: LEARN MORE ABOUT “IF,” “BUT,” AND “WHEN.”

Developmental Affirmations are unconditional. There are no strings attached.

The words “if,” “but,” and “when” make a message conditional. They have price tags. For example: “I love you” is an affirmation. “I love you, but I wish you would behave as well as your sister,” is not.

“I like your smile,” is an affirmation.

“I like you if you smile at me,” is not.

“I love you just the way you are,” is an affirmation.

“I love you when you are good,” is not.

Make the affirmations you create positive, possible, reasonable and doable. One person announced, “I have a new affirmation. Money falls on me when I am awake and when I am sleeping.” Reasonable? No. Doable? Hardly. This is not an affirmation; it is a wish. Affirmations are strength-building messages you give to yourself or offer to other people. Remember, they are always about what to do, not about what not to do. For example, “I am practicing becoming more patient” is a reminder affirmation to yourself. “I will stop being so impatient” is not, because an affirmation doesn’t tell you what to do.

QUESTION 11.

WHAT IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN OFFERING THESE AFFIRMATIONS, AND WISH YOU HAD?



You can start now. Give them to yourself and others.



You can trust your inner wisdom.
Interdependence – Stage 7

DIGGING DEEPER: SEE HOW OTHERS MAY RESPOND AND HOW TO PROCEED.

Some kids respond to these affirmations with, "I like that." Some adults say, "That is a better way of talking." If they say, "What's this weird talk?" it may be time to change from talk to action. If children resist or say, "What's this new stuff about?" You can answer, "Yes, this is new because it's my job to find better ways to parent. That's my job and not your choice, so give it a try." Some children hassle or argue as a way to connect with parents and get their attention. If children need to hassle, to push, the affirmations provide a safe topic with which to do that.

QUESTION 12.

WHEN DO YOU NOT OFFER DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS?



Don't give an affirmation to someone else at a moment when you are angry or when you yourself don't feel and believe it. If you do give one that you don't believe, people may pick up the conflict in it and feel confused or mistrustful, instead of affirmed. Don't offer a message with a "but," "if," or "when." "I love you *when* you are helpful" is a condition, not an affirmation. It implies that "I love you when you are helpful, but I don't love you when you are not helpful." Don't quote an Affirmation to others when you are upset. Shouting "I love who you are" in anger sends a very mixed and confusing message.



I'm glad you are starting to think for yourself.
Thinking – Stage 3

DIGGING DEEPER: TAKE CARE-OF-YOURSELF MESSAGE.

If you aren't comfortable giving some of these messages to your children, decide if they would be

beneficial. If so, do what you need to do for yourself. Get help, rest, education, coaching, or counseling. Do whatever will help you grow, so that you can affirm with comfort and confidence.

QUESTION 13.

WHAT IF YOU OR SOMEONE ELSE DOESN'T BELIEVE AN AFFIRMATION?



No one is to be criticized for not understanding, wanting, or believing an affirmation — yourself included. Sometimes people gobble up affirmations. Sometimes they say, “They are nice” and ignore them. Some say, “I don’t get it” and toss them out. Trust people to know what they need and move at a pace that is helpful to them. Don’t give a message to others unless you believe it. You can give yourself affirmations that you wish you believed. You will be tapping into the healthy, loving part of yourself. If other people don’t believe, simply make the Developmental Affirmations available to use if and when they decide they want to use them.



You can grow at your own pace.
Being – Stage 1

DIGGING DEEPER: STORIES ABOUT DEALING WITH RESISTANCE.

When we meet children or adults who, for whatever reasons, reject the affirmations, or resent or ridicule the ovals, we accept their right to do that. Sometimes an adult reads the affirmations,

recognizes that he or she did not receive them as a child, rejects them, takes time to grieve the loss, and then returns to learn more about these life-supporting messages and uses them to grow.

The mom who accepted the resistance

The son, as he was growing up, often made fun of the ovals. The mom kept them visible in the house and asked about them frequently with the expectation that he would think about and use them. Usually, she spoke about the affirmations with others, not directly to him. No pushing. Gradually the ridicule subsided. Now it was September, time for college. On the day they were packing the son's bags, Mom dropped four bags of small ovals into his backpack. The son picked up the bags and handed them back to her. With an appreciative look, he said, "Thanks, Mom. I don't need the affirmations. I already know them." Late in October, he called home. "Mom, please send four or five sets of affirmations. I have friends who need them."

For kids who don't believe, offer the option of putting the ovals in their pockets and giving themselves the messages anyway.

The teacher who let the students discover

The new special education students shuffled reluctantly into the classroom. Their clothing and body language told Jim Sorenson he would have to develop rapport and trust with these kids before he could teach them anything. These are students who don't learn from lectures. They need action. He decided to handle the kids' disrespect by modeling completely respectful behavior. He hung poster-sized affirmations for birth through adolescent stages around the classroom. He put them low on the walls below the whiteboards. He left a bowl of the small affirmations on his desk and said nothing about them. The class members read some of the affirmations aloud and asked questions about them. Jim answered each question very briefly. No lectures. When students asked, "Why do you have those dumb messages everywhere?" Jim's only answer was, "They help." One day, a troublemaker interrupted a lesson with a loud, "Sorenson! Put those dumb sayings of yours up on the walls where we can see them." Jim said nothing and moved the posters up above the whiteboards. At the end of a school day that had included a playground altercation, a sometimes-troublemaker slouched into the room with a boy from another class, grabbed the bowl of ovals, and demanded, "Sorenson! Can I give my friend some of your dumb messages? He needs them." Jim offered a quiet, "Of course."

The mom who ignored the resistance, the eye-rolling and the giggling

As soon as afternoon school was out, Effie's junior high friends descended on her house for food, gossip and complaints about teachers. They also devoted considerable time to giggling about and ridiculing the plate-sized affirmation ovals hanging all around the sunroom. Effie's mom was learning about Developmental Affirmations and thought they were wonderful. She was even learning how to teach a class about them. Effie's friends tried to be respectful of the mom's enthusiasm, but it was hard not to laugh at the words on the ovals. They were so dorky! Years later, after a reunion of the friends, Effie's Mom got a phone call. "Mom, do you still have those affirmations? The ones that hung in the sunroom, the ones we made so much fun of? We girls got together yesterday. We all have junior high aged kids now, and we realized it would be easier to deal with them if we had the affirmations. Can you help?"

You probably have many stories of your own.

QUESTION 14.

HOW CAN PROFESSIONALS INTEGRATE DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS INTO THEIR WORK?



In many different ways. The Developmental Affirmations can be integrated any time a professional in a helping field is teaching about development, parenting or personal growth. For instance, the affirmations can be embedded within a meeting or can be used at the opening and closing.



You can learn to use old skills in new ways.
Identity, Sexuality, and Separation – Stage 6

DIGGING DEEPER: EXAMPLES.

As an opening, affirmations can raise the energy in the group, set a tone for growth and start everyone off with a positive message. An affirmation at the end of a meeting can provide closure, echo a topic of the meeting, express appreciation, or provide hope. You can write the

Developmental Affirmations on your own cards, or print them out as a [handout list](#) or [bookmarks](#). You can also [purchase them as colored affirmation ovals cards](#).

Setting a positive tone for growth:

- Ayolanda spread the affirmation ovals word-side-up on a table. She posted a sign saying: “Please choose three affirmations that will help you get what you want from today’s meeting and ask two or three people to read the messages to you.” At the close of the meeting, she asked people to reread their affirmations and asked participants, “Did you get what you wanted? Raise a hand.” “Did you get more than you expected? Raise a hand.”
- Kim, who was leading a support group for dementia caregivers, started a meeting by giving everyone a copy of the Interdependence affirmation “Your love matures and expands,” and asked each person to find three additional affirmations that would support that message and to share them with a partner. At the close of the meeting, he asked the group to say, “Your love matures and expands” aloud in unison, thinking about themselves and then saying it again, beaming the message to the whole caregiver group.

Focusing the topic of the meeting:

- Leading a parenting group Ryan started the meeting with, “Choose three affirmations that could help your child become more competent. Tell your partner why you chose one of the affirmations.” At the end of the meeting, he asked people to reread the affirmations they chose at the beginning to see if they were still helpful. If someone needed a different one, he asked them to choose a new one and read it to their partner.
- Carrie, who was teaching the parenting program, The Developmental Parenting Highway, began the meeting with: “Look at the list of affirmations. Choose two that would help you be more confident at a moment when your parenting feels off track.” At the end of the meeting, she asked people to choose two affirmations that celebrate their ability to stay on track and keep their cars in the most helpful lane of the Parenting Highway, and to read the affirmations to the person next to them. This sends people out of the meeting with helpful words to hang on to. [Click here for the online course](#).

Embedding

Affirmations may be embedded as an integral part of a program. For example, affirmations are a fundamental part of parenting education, “How Much is Too Much?,” [“Growing up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children,”](#) and [“How Much is Too Much, Leader’s Guide.”](#) “How Much is Too Much?” is a research-based general parenting program that focuses on countering and reducing childhood overindulgence. Each of the six meetings includes information about the affirmations and an affirmation activity. The activities are designed to use the affirmations to support child development. They can also be used to support parenting strategies that help children learn that they are loveable, capable, and responsible to others in their homes and in their communities. “Growing Up Again” is a powerful general parent education program that helps parents get *their* developmental needs met while meeting the developmental

needs of their children. It is also helpful for parents who want to parent differently than they were parented. In each of the six sessions, there are affirmation activities that support the growth of both parent and child.

Creating affirmations for specific needs

These affirmations can be a springboard for identifying affirmations for specific needs, such as adoption, foster care, stepchildren, disabilities, illness and recovery, or transitions. See how Connie Dawson adapted the developmental affirmations for adoption and foster care.



PART III.

AFFIRMATION OVALS

QUESTION 15.

WHY USE THE COLORED OVAL DISKS? WHY NOT JUST USE THE LIST OF AFFIRMATIONS?



Feel free to use both. People learn better when they engage more of their senses. If they see, hear *and* do something, they will retain more than if they only hear the message.

[Click here to download a handout of the Developmental Affirmations.](#)

[Click here to download a handout of the Affirmation Ovals.](#)



You can use all your senses when you explore.

Doing – Stage 2

DIGGING DEEPER: MORE ON LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES.

- While visual learners learn well from lists, people who learn more easily by doing things with their hands, or by experiences, often discover that handling the ovals speeds their

learning.

- People don't need to focus on all of the affirmations messages at one time, so using individual ovals helps some people identify the specific messages they need at the moment.
- Many people like the comfort of knowing they have the whole list while they use the individual affirmation ovals. Others are overwhelmed by the list and find using a few ovals much more manageable.

QUESTION 16.

WHAT IS THE SUB-SET OF AFFIRMATIONS CALLED THE LOVE AFFIRMATIONS?



The Love Affirmations are the ones that say, “I love you unconditionally for being yourself and for doing the developmental tasks of your stage.” They are marked with hearts on the [Developmental Affirmations handout](#) (see also Question 2: Where is a list of the Developmental Affirmations?). They are the messages placed at the right ends of the Affirmation bookmarks. There is a template of the [Affirmations as bookmarks](#) that you can print and use.



Your love matures and expands.
Interdependence – Stage 7

DIGGING DEEPER: LEARN MORE ABOUT THE LOVE AFFIRMATIONS.

The Developmental Affirmations are all based on love. See more in Chapter 18: What if I don't know about the Developmental Stages?

PART IV.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

QUESTION 17.

WHAT ARE THE DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF GROWING UP?



A developmental stage is a period of life during which a person can be expected to focus on several important age-appropriate tasks. As we grow up, we pass through a series of developmental stages on our way from conception to maturity. During the journey from infancy to old age, we make powerful decisions about ourselves based on how we interpret the world, and how the people closest respond to us. This includes how they take care of us, what caregivers tell us about ourselves, how they treat us, and how we see them treat others.

The stages of life are adapted from the work of Eric Erickson. They include the seven stages of birth to adulthood, plus the Prenatal stage, which is now recognized as a highly important stage, and the Integration stage, as people are living so much longer now.



You can look upon your journey through life's stages as natural transitions.

You can look upon your journey through life's stages as natural transitions.

Integration

DIGGING DEEPER: MORE ABOUT THE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT.

The ages at which developmental stages get major focus may vary somewhat, and are impacted by the person's temperament, family situation and the environment.

In adult life, we re-focus on each task many times according to our rhythms of growth and in response to our life experiences.

The Tasks are:

- **Becoming, Prenatal:** Getting ready.
- **Being (Stage 1), 0 to 6 months:** Deciding to live, to be.
- **Doing (Stage 2), 6 to 18 months:** Moving and exploring.
- **Thinking (Stage 3), 18 months to 3 years:** The terrific twos, thinking for myself.
- **Identity and Power (Stage 4), 3 to 6 years:** "Who am I? Who are they?" and "How do I manage that?"
- **Structure (Stage 5), 6 to 12 years:** Here's how you do it.
- **Identity Sexuality and Separation (Stage 6), Adolescence:** Oh, those hormones!
- **Interdependence (Stage 7), adult years:** So much to do.
- **Integration, End of life:** Looking back, giving back, wrapping up. This stage cannot have age designations. Some people grow through many years of the Integration stage, and others meet death at a young age with little time for integration.

These developmental tasks are shaped by the person's age, by both physical development and brain development, and by their particular personality characteristics and genetic gifts.

Persons growing in a calm setting may move smoothly from one stage to another. However, persons coping with a disruptive environment may have to delay a task until later when the situation offers an opportunity to play catch-up. For example, fear was ridiculed in Tracy's family, so she learned to ignore her fear. As a young adult she got into dangerous situations. Later, it was her husband who taught her what is dangerous and what is not. "Tracy, stop! That could be dangerous!" Some people never learn a missed task, but the opportunity is always there.

The following list goes into more depth for some major tasks of each developmental stage:



TASK: BECOMING

Stage Prenatal

First big focus age: prenatal

The prenatal stage lays the groundwork for all the stages to follow. During these nine months, if all goes well, the baby's body is developing from the genetic gift of the egg and the sperm to a full-term infant with all life-support system intact and ready to grow to full potential. Simultaneously, the new being is making life-shaping decisions in response to the environment of the womb and the related experiences of the mother with other people and with the baby.

- I celebrate that you are alive.
- Your needs and safety are important to me.
- We are connected, and you are whole.
- You can make healthy decisions about your experiences.
- You can be born when you are ready.
- Your life is your own.

♥ I love you just as you are.

For Adults: We all need permission to develop fully, to move on to the next stage of life. For example, these affirmations are important in every beginning, in every transition in life, and also when we are ill, tired, hurt, vulnerable, or grieving the loss of people, a job, or a dream.



TASK: BEING

Stage 1

First big focus age: birth to six months

Stage 1 is about deciding to be, to live, to thrive, to trust, to call out to have needs met, to expect to have needs met, to be joyful. These decisions are important to nourish and amplify throughout our whole lives.

- I'm glad you are alive.

- You belong here.
- What you need is important to me.
- I'm glad you are you.
- You can grow at your own pace.
- You can feel all of your feelings.

♥ I love you, and I care for you willingly.

For Adults: We all need permission to know it's okay for us to be here, be alive, make our needs known, and to be cared for. We may want to recycle or revisit these tasks whenever we start anything new: job, relationship, welcoming a new sibling.



TASK: DOING
Stage 2

First big focus age: 6-18 months

Stage 2 — the “doing” stage — is a powerful time when it is important for the children to decide to trust others, to trust that it is safe and wonderful to explore, to trust their senses, to know what they know, to be creative and active, and to get support while doing these things.

- You can explore and experiment, and I will support and protect you.
- You can use all of your senses when you explore.
- You can do things as many times as you need to.
- You can know what you know.
- You can be interested in everything.
- I like to watch you initiate and grow and learn.

♥ I love you when you are active and when you are quiet.

For Adults: We all need permission to know it's okay for us to try new things and ideas, and to trust what we learn from that exploration. We can use these affirmations when we are starting anything that requires learning new skills, entering new groups or new relationships, marriage, divorce, retirement.



TASK: THINKING

Stage 3

First big focus age: 18 months to 3 years

To separate from parents, children must learn to think and solve problems. Learning to express and handle feelings is also important. These lessons are the focus of stage 3 — the “thinking” stage.

In stage 3, children have to start to give up some of their beliefs about being the center of the universe. This makes some of them angry, and they may get into power struggles. They have been mistakenly labeled “terrible.” Try labeling them “terrific” or “courageous” as they learn to handle feelings and to use cause and effect thinking.

- I’m glad you are starting to think for yourself.
- It’s OK for you to be angry, and I won’t let you hurt yourself or others.
- You can say no and push and test limits as much as you need to.
- You can learn to think for yourself, and I will think for myself.
- You can think and feel at the same time.
- You can know what you need and ask for help.

♥ You can become separate from me, and I will continue to love you.

For Adults: We all need permission to do cause and effect thinking, to use what we feel to help us think clearly, to think for ourselves, and to be sure about what we think.



TASK: IDENTITY & POWER

Stage 4

First big focus age: 3–6 years

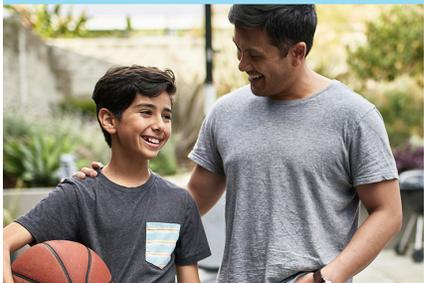
The questions of stage 4 focus on the questions: “Who are they? Who am I?” and “What do I do about that?” They help the child establish an individual identity, learn skills, and figure out role and power relationships with others. An active imagination helps.

- You can explore who you are and find out who other people are.

- You can be powerful and ask for help at the same time.
- You can try out different roles and ways of being powerful.
- You can find out the results of your behavior.
- All of your feelings are OK with me.
- You can learn what is pretend and what is real.

♥ I love who you are.

For Adults: We all need permission to be uniquely ourselves, to fit that in with respect for ourselves and for others, to find out the positive and negative consequences of our behaviors. The affirmations are important during any new or changing relationship: new job, new friend, marriage, divorce, retirement, anyone learning to be more direct and less manipulative.



TASK: STRUCTURE
Stage 5

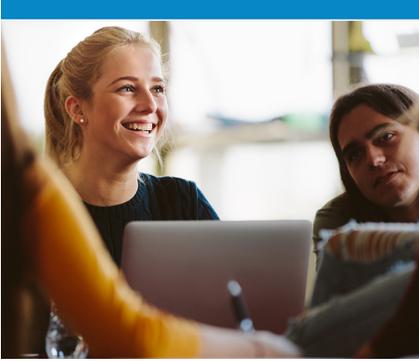
First big focus age: 6–12 years

During stage 5, children learn more about structure and install their internal structures. This includes understanding the need for rules, the freedom that comes from having appropriate rules, and the relevancy of rules. Examining the values on which rules are based is important. Another major task of this state is acquiring many kinds of skills.

- You can think before you say yes or no and learn from your mistakes.
- You can trust your intuition to help you decide what to do.
- You can find a way of doing things that works for you.
- You can learn the rules that help you live with others.
- You can learn when and how to disagree.
- You can think for yourself and get help instead of staying in distress.

♥ I love you even when we differ; I love growing with you.

For Adults: We all need permission to become ever more competent, to master the social and technical skills we need, and to be responsible about rules and limits. The affirmations are useful when learning new skills to care for ourselves, to become more effective in our parenting, to manage a new job or changes on the job, to learn a new sport or activity.



TASK: IDENTITY, SEXUALITY, AND SEPARATION

Stage 6

First big focus age: 12 to 18 years

The tasks of this stage focus on identity, sexuality, separation and increased competence.

Identity:

Who am I? Who are they? How are we the same and different?

Sexuality:

Managing hormonal and role changes and expectations in a safe way.

Separations:

To emerge gradually as a separate, independent person with own identity while creating a new relationship with parents.

Competence:

Expanding the skill set that was the focus of Structure, stage 6.

- You can know who you are and learn and practice skills for independence.
- You can learn the difference between sex and nurturing and be responsible for your needs and behavior.
- You can develop your own interests, relationships, and causes.
- You can learn to use old skills in new ways.
- You can grow in your gender identity and still be dependent at times.
- I look forward to knowing you as an adult.

♥ My love is always with you. I trust you to ask for my support.

For the Adult: We all need permission to be separate, unique, and morally responsible persons while we are building our ability to be interdependent. We need to foster healthy relationships with others and to know when to separate from those who are harmful to us. We need to keep our personal identity independent of how much money we make, how many races we won, our sexual preference, changing sexual roles, marriage, divorce.



TASK: INTERDEPENDENCE

Stage 7

First big focus age: adult years

The developmental tasks of adulthood focus on the journey from Independence to Interdependence, and they include regular revisiting/recycling of earlier tasks in ways that support the specific adult tasks.

- Your needs are important.
 - You can be uniquely yourself and honor the uniqueness of others.
 - You can be independent and interdependent.
 - Through the years, you can expand your commitments to your own growth, to your family, your friends, your community, and to all humankind.
 - You can build and examine your commitments to your values and causes, your roles and tasks.
 - You can be responsible for your contributions to each of your commitments.
 - You can be creative, competent, productive, and joyful.
 - You can trust your inner wisdom.
 - You can say your hellos and goodbyes to people, roles, dreams and decisions.
 - You can finish each part of your journey and look forward to the next.
 - Your love matures and expands.
- ♥ You are lovable at every age.

For Adults: We all need permission to balance our needs to care for ourselves with caring for others (younger and older), to maintain some independence as we move into interdependence with our families and society. It is important to develop competence through all of the stages of adult life: caring for children, for ourselves, for elders, for any who are dependent on us, and for the society in which we live.



TASK: INTEGRATION

Stage End of Life

Dying is a part of living, and this stage of life could probably be called “Living Until You Die.” No matter what our circumstances, this can be a time of being in charge in a new way. We can be in charge of how we see ourselves and the world. We can be in charge of what we make of every day. We can live to the greatest degree we are able. Development continues until we die. The task of this part of life is the integration of the past with the present and preparation for the future.

- You can grow your whole life through.
- You can look upon your journey through life’s stages as natural transitions.
- You can integrate all of your life experiences.
- You can celebrate the gifts you have received and the gifts you have given.
- You deserve the support that you need.
- You can share your wisdom in your way.

♥ You are lovable just the way you are.

We all need permission to sort the many meanings of our lives, to recognize the gifts we have given and the gifts we have received. These affirmations are important any time we question the meaning of life, and especially when we are contemplating the close of a segment of life’s journey or facing death.

QUESTION 18.

WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES?



Now is a good time to start learning.

You can start to learn about the Developmental Stages by reading the article “Love Affirmations: Build Self-Esteem in Children” (WE Issue 4 Volume 7, Number 5), which offers a description of developmental stages and unconditional love.



You can know what you know.

Doing – Stage 2

DIGGING DEEPER: READ THE ARTICLE.

LOVE AFFIRMATIONS: BUILD SELF-ESTEEM IN CHILDREN

Self-esteem is the gift of love most of us would like to be able to give our children — the children we parent or teach or care about. We want our children to have self-confidence and to know that

they are lovable. Some days we aren't sure how to do that. Some days our own self-esteem is low and we wonder how to give what we do not have. Like yesterday, when I did something that I vowed I would never do because I hated when my parents did it. But I did it because the old way is "bred-in-the-bone" and I fall back on it when I am unsure of myself or when I have lost sight of other options. So what are my options? How can I build my internal resources?

What is self-esteem made of?

I can remember that children build self-esteem on a two-part foundation, the belief that they are lovable and the belief that they are capable. I need to instill both of these. I can also remember that I can't parent perfectly; I only have to do it well enough for today.

We can increase our lovable resources and offer love without entanglement.

Love — unconditional love — should be every child's birth right. It is the gift that you and I commit to give our children when we sign on for the job of parenting. "But," you say, "I didn't get much of it myself so I don't have an instinct for how to do that. It is easy for me to be conditional, to say, 'I love you when you please me.'" Don't worry! We can learn new skills at any age. Or, you say, "If I haven't been giving it, I will feel guilty or hopeless." Don't fret! Forgive yourself and start today. Human beings have an amazing ability to fill in what they did not get earlier. Or you say, "My children know that I love them," or "I tell them every week; isn't that enough?" Partly. We need to say it in lots of different ways. And, children learn more from what we do than from what we say. "Okay, okay," you say, "I'm willing to say it and do it in new ways, but how?"

I love you, period

First of all, practice saying, "I love you" without any double-binding "whens" or "ifs" or "untils" or "as-long-as" or "except whens." Just plain, "I love you." Period. My mother used to say, "I love you when you are good." Then she didn't tell me how to be good! "I love you (period)" is the way we help our children get past some of the "I love you when ..." double-binds that we experienced. Love is unconditional. All of the "whens" and "ifs" link love to approval and have caused some of us adults to doubt that straight unconditional love even exists. But it does, and as we feel it for our children, we can start to reclaim some of it for ourselves. We can practice in the shower saying, "I love myself, I love myself, I love myself" until it feels comfortable. We can let all of the old "I love you when you take care of me" and "I love you if you keep the family secrets" messages run down the drain and leave us with the pure, clean love that we want to offer our kids.

"But," you ask, "Don't we ever say anything more than 'I love you?'" Yes, indeed. There are specific love messages or affirmations that we offer to let children know that we love them unconditionally and that we are glad they are doing the developmental tasks that they need to be doing for their age and stage. "I love you and it's okay with me that you are doing your developmental tasks." Here are the specific unconditional love messages that are important all of our lives, but that put special focus on the task of each developmental stage. I will address the stages one at a time. You can think about the messages and then decide on ways to let your children know, both by what you say and what you do, that these messages come from you with

truth and sincerity. Let your children know that you want them to believe the messages and to incorporate these esteem-building foundation blocks.

I love you and I care for you willingly

The BEING task starts from birth to 6 months (and continues all of our lives.) The job is to decide to live, to “be.” When your infant has loving, willing care, he can learn to trust — to trust his own ability to call out and get his needs met and to trust his world. He especially needs to trust his special caregiving one(s), to be reached-out-to, to be loved and smiled at, talked to, hugged, and cherished. Each time you say these affirming words or do one of these actions you help your infant build a firm ground of self-esteem.

“But,” you say, “How can I let him know I care for him willingly when he has colic and I have an acute case of fatigue and guilt, and want to quit?” Do what you can for him. Have him checked by your doctor and try all of the medical suggestions. Tell him. Say, “Baby boy, I love you and I want to help and right now I don’t know what to do and I am tired and grumpy, but underneath all that I want you to know that I love you and I wish you didn’t hurt.”

Then get someone else to care for him for an evening while you get out and have some relief and some fun. Care for yourself. Continue to say and believe this affirmation for him and for yourself for the rest of your lives.

I love you when you are active and when you are quiet

The DOING task starts from 6 to 18 months (and continues all of our lives.) At this age your child separates from your lap and moves out to explore her world. Not the complex world of politics, philosophy, or television, but the immediate world of sights, sounds, tastes, textures, shapes, sizes and places. How can you prepare this world for her? Hopefully, she will have one or two rooms in which to do her exploring freely, with firm gates protecting her from rooms that have the hazards of grown-up comforts. Remove everything that would be unsafe for her and put safety plugs in the electric outlets. Can she pound a toy on the coffee table to find out how that feels and sounds? If not, move the “good” coffee table behind the gate and get one she can pound and climb on. Think of things to put on the table for her — objects that are round, square, smooth, rough, cool, warm, colorful, noisy, or quiet, and all sturdy or dispensable pots, pans, boxes, old magazines, simple toys.

Being

**I love you
and I care
for you
willingly.**

She needs things to pile and stack and she needs safe places she can climb on and roll off. “I love you when you are active.”

She also needs to have you (or someone) available so she can crawl up and have a lap-sit and a thumb-suck or sometimes just tug on your leg and get a pat and a greeting. Sometimes, just when neighbors come and you want them to see her perform, she gets fussy and needs to rest. “I love you when you are quiet.” Let her rest. The neighbors can see her later.

Doing

I love you
when you
are active and
when you
are quiet.

All of the ways that you prepare a safe, stimulating environment for her help her lay down the belief that she is lovable and capable — essential building blocks for self-esteem and for trusting her senses later on in a way that will help her achieve in school. This is a busy time for her and for you. Make the effort to get plenty of rest. Build the support system you need to swap or buy child care so you can have some grown-up time away from your busy explorer. Take care of yourself too.

You can become separate from me and I will continue to love you

The THINKING stage starts from 18 months to 3 years (and continues all of our lives.) During this stage, your child continues to explore and enjoy his environment. He also begins to focus on you and to explore some new ways of relating to you. He needs to find out how you respond to anger, to contrariness, and to his insisting on doing things his way. Some children do this with great gusto and many tantrums. Others are more easy going. Either way, your child is learning to think for himself in preparation for becoming independent and responsible for himself later on. He needs to take a position contrary to you and to be sure that you will still continue to love him unconditionally. He needs to practice saying no and to have you accept his no and not make him hold to it. Maybe Nancy Reagan would not have had to admonish so many of us to “Just Say No to Drugs!” if we had been allowed to practice our no-saying fully and freely as 2-year-olds. When we are older than 2, we can re-learn this skill, but 2 is the natural and easy time to learn it.

You can insist that a few safety rules be followed and continue to make the decisions about what is good for and safe for the child. He needs you **to not give in** to his tantrums or he will expect to get what he wants by overpowering other people. He needs you **to not overpower** his tantrums or he will come to believe that he is powerless. When you act bored with tantrums and insist that he start to use cause and effect thinking, and that he use words for what he wants, he learns to think for himself.

Thinking

You can
become
separate from
me and I will
continue to
love you.

Some of us need breaks from children (and adults) who are practicing how to say no, especially if we grew up in families where we were deprived of the opportunity to say no or were taught that it was wrong. If we are just regaining that skill ourselves, we get tense about it at times, but the effort is worth it. Think what a great self-esteem building skill it is to be able to say “no” freely.

I love who you are

The IDENTITY & POWER stage starts at 3 to 6 years (and continues all of our lives.) “I love who you are.” What an astounding message this is for those of us who depended on “doing” for our okay-ness. “I love who you are.” Roll it over your tongue. Repeat it, emphasizing a different word each time. Let it in. If you don’t believe it (yet) for yourself, you will need to take special care to offer it to your child. “I love who you are.” That is separate from what you do, how you look, what you say, how you smell. I love you for being you — you are not a projection of me. You do not have to be like me or different from me — you can be you.

And what a broad experience of practicing “I love who you are” the 3- to 6-year-old offers us! One day she is a fairy and the next day a dog, a fire fighter, a carpenter, a teacher, a Mom or a Dad, as she tries on different identities in her quest for roles that fit her. She may still have some 2-year-old testing to do, but mainly she is figuring out who she is in relationship to other people and how to be powerful with them.

Since she is also busy increasing her power by learning skills, this is a natural time for you to start teaching her some social manners. Her questions and demands may seem incessant. At 3 she is asking, "Why?" at 4 insisting, "It's dumb and I hate it," at 5, "How does it work?" In order not to inadvertently teach her to be manipulative or aggressive, you need to keep your interactions and feelings straight with her. Telling her to be good may scare her, or confuse her, but it does not tell her what to do. Give her specific directions. "Put your toys in the basket." "Here's how to pet the kitty gently." "Now is the time to say 'thank you.'" "In five minutes it will be time to go. Then I will tell you to get your coat and put it on." "When you step on my foot it hurts and I get angry. Stand here instead."

All of the time you are supporting her doing and enjoying her role exploration and encouraging her imagination, you are fostering her self-esteem by letting her know in many different ways, "I love who you are."

I love you even when we differ; I love growing with you

The STRUCTURE stage starts at 6 to 12 years (and continues all of our lives.) During the grade school years your child is busy practicing and learning skills. He learns physical, mental, social and emotional skills, and spiritual values, and some of these will need to be different from ours. He takes more and more responsibility for his own self-esteem.

Sometimes he pursues a variety of interests with an intensity that is amazing to adults. He may rescue a baby squirrel (social, nurturing skills), play hockey (physical, social skills), consider plate tectonics (mental), bug his sister (social and emotional), decide whether to steal something with his friends (spiritual, social, emotional, mental), eat innumerable snacks (physical), do or forget to do his chores, (mental, social), argue with you (emotional, mental, social), and deal with his hurt and anger that his best friend did him wrong (social, emotional and spiritual).

Meanwhile, you and I are wishing he would be quiet, scrape his shoes, be polite, clean his room, and not hassle.

So you help him build his own self-esteem by exposing him to a wide variety of skill-building situations. You are clear about the family rules, negotiating the negotiable ones and enforcing the non-negotiable ones in a matter-of-fact, non-shaming way. Avoid, "You can't do that, you

Identity & power



I love
who
you are.

Structure



I love you
even when
we differ;
I love growing
with you.

don't do that well enough. You will never get that right. You must be interested in my interests." Instead say, "You can learn. I believe you can do it. I'll watch and cheer. Would you like some help?" Remember that the hassling that these kids do is part of their important exploration of rules and which ones are firm and what happens when they break them. Hassling and arguing is not something we parents need to take personally, even though we may need a time-out now and then. We learn lots from these busy kids. "I love you even when we differ; I love growing with you."

My love is always with you. I trust you to ask for my support

The IDENTITY, SEXUALITY & SEPARATION stage starts at 13 to 18 years (and continues all of our lives.) As youngsters move from being children to becoming adults, their theme song is "Sometimes I'm Up, Sometimes I'm Down." They have to learn to handle the complex emotions that accompany their hormonal/sexual changes as they continue to separate from their parents and move toward an individual identity and a place among grown-ups.

Supporting the development of self-esteem during this complex growth period sometimes taxes the patience and flexibility of parents.

Adolescents often switch from an unsure, dependent attitude to responsible, mature behavior with amazing rapidity. No wonder parents are often out-of-phase with their teen, treating her like a baby when she wants to be a grown-up equal, and expecting her to be responsible when she is feeling confused or neglected. If this sounds familiar, forgive yourself. You can't always know what mood she will be in. You can support her self-esteem by letting her know that you are there for her. "Do you want to talk about it?" "Can I help?" "I do care about you!"

Identity, sexuality, & separation

My love is
always with
you. I trust
you to ask for
my support.

It helps to remember that teens revisit earlier developmental tasks to learn to do them in more grown-up ways. You can continue to give your teen all of the affirming messages from the earlier stages. You can continue to be in charge of the family rules with more and more help from her in setting, negotiating and enforcing them. "Yes, you must observe curfew," or, "Yes, you must let us know when you will be home late. We worry about you." "No, you may not take the car tonight. You left the gas tank empty last time you drove." "No, you may not drink before you are legally of age."

You can remember that the early adolescent often breaks rules because those rules are no longer functional for her, or she breaks them to see if you still care enough to maintain the family structure. When the late adolescent breaks rules it may be because she has been close to you and the world looks scary, so she helps herself move on by making the family situation so

uncomfortable that she doesn't want to stay home. Don't take it personally. If you hold with the esteem-building words, actions and belief "My love is always with you. I trust you to ask for my support," she will probably come back as a separated adult, participating in the family as a responsible, loving grown-up.

QUESTION 19.

HOW ARE DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS AND STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT CONNECTED?



Perhaps the easiest way to link the Developmental Affirmations with the stages of development is to compare a list of the affirmations with the list of jobs of that developmental stage.



I love you even when we differ, I love growing with you.

Structure – Stage 5

DIGGING DEEPER: TRY AN ACTIVITY THAT LINKS THE AFFIRMATIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS.

Here are the Developmental Affirmations for stage 4, Power and Identity, and the developmental tasks of that stage. Try doing this activity. It can lead to lots of thinking. If you are doing this as a group activity, don't expect people's diagrams (arrowed patterns) to match. People interpret things differently. That's okay.



Affirmations and Jobs of the Child

Stage Four—Identity and Power *From about 3 to about 6 years*

The tasks of this stage focus on learnings and activities that help the person establish an individual identity, learn skills, and figure out role and power relationships with others.

Directions: Read the affirmations. For each affirmation, draw a line to the job that the affirmation supports.

Jobs of the child - developmental tasks

IDENTITY & POWER
You can explore who you are and find out who other people are.

1. To assert an identity separate from others.
2. To acquire information about the world, himself, his body, his gender role.
3. To learn that behaviors have consequences, both positive and negative.
4. To test ideas and values and learn value options beyond the family.
5. To discover her effect on others and her place in groups.
6. To learn to exert power to affect relationships.
7. To practice socially appropriate behavior.
8. To separate fantasy from reality.
9. To learn what he has power over and what he does not have power over.
10. To do simple chores.
11. To continue learning earlier developmental tasks.

IDENTITY & POWER
All of your feelings are OK with me.

IDENTITY & POWER
You can be powerful and ask for help at the same time.

IDENTITY & POWER
You can learn what is pretend and what is real.

IDENTITY & POWER
You can try out different roles and ways of being powerful.

IDENTITY & POWER
You can find out the results of your behavior.

IDENTITY & POWER
I love who you are.

7-09

green

Jean Illsley Clarke

[Click here to download a PDF booklet of similar activities for all of the Stages.](#)

QUESTION 20.

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENTAL RECYCLING?



Recycling is the name given to the natural process of revisiting earlier developmental tasks and learning to do them in more sophisticated ways. Recycling may be triggered by the natural rhythms of life or by specific life events such as starting a new job, losing a friend, having a baby, getting married or divorced, or the death of a loved one. Parents sometimes recycle the stage their child is growing through.

Each time we recycle a developmental stage, the affirmations for that stage are especially supportive and may lead to new levels of meaning for us.

You can
do things
as many
times as you
need to.

You can do things as many times as you need to.

Doing – Stage 2

DIGGING DEEPER: READ MORE ABOUT RECYCLING.

WHAT IS RECYCLING?

The theory of recycling proposes that the emotional and intellectual developmental tasks of childhood are basic to human life at every age. Therefore, those same tasks will be addressed again and again as there is a need for them to be updated to meet life's new demands. This updating or recycling occurs in a rhythmic cycle which, at times, may be superseded in response to events in life that demand a focus on specific tasks.

Remember that this is a theory for you to think about. Of course it does not explain all behaviors, but as you read the following stories you may think of behaviors that could be attributed to recycling.

A Theory of Hope

Recycling is a theory that offers hope in two ways. The first is the idea that when we meet a new situation where our old skills don't apply, we can recycle, build on, or bring up to speed the skills we learned earlier.

The second hopeful aspect is that if we missed something during our growing up years, we can find ways to claim and recycle those skills in positive ways during later years. Sometimes this requires the help of a skilled therapist or the support of a counselor or social worker. Many adults get the help they need by doing everyday activities that can support the recycling process. Examples of these activities are offered for each developmental stage in "[Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children.](#)"

The recycling theory can be very helpful to us in parenting. As our children learn new tasks, we get to recycle ours. In addition, if we are having difficulty parenting a particular age child, we can look back at our own childhood to see if there were some things we didn't get. If so, we need to get those in adult ways now so we don't get in competition with our children over whose needs will be met.

To explore the ideas of recycling, let us look first at how children may recycle, then at adolescent behaviors, and then at examples of adult recycling.

CHILDHOOD

Recycling or Regressing – When Children Act Little

When children act little, what is going on?

Why is she acting like that? I thought we finished that six months ago. I'm worried about her!

Regression?

At 12-years-old, Amos was confined to the house with a boring illness. His mother was amused

and interested when he pulled out the box of old Legos and spent three hours building a magnificent tower. He hadn't played with Legos for years. She remarked that Amos had regressed.

The word regression is often loosely used to describe a behavior that is typical of a younger age. But, strictly speaking, Amos had not regressed. He certainly had not experienced the dictionary definition of regression as "a return to a former stage of life, especially through hypnosis or mental illness." He had not relapsed, reverted, or deteriorated. Nor had he experienced the second definition of regression, "a retreat to immaturity." While he may have been building the Lego edifice with an 8-year-old's delight, he had responded to his mother's questions in his usual 12-year-old manner, and the tower he built was far more sophisticated than any he had built at a younger age. We could say he was *recycling* Lego building.

A form of *regression* that many parents are familiar with happens when a very young child is presented with a new baby. At 3-years-old, Kendra retreated to immaturity. She lost toilet training, whined, cried, demanded a bottle, and wanted to be rocked any time the parents were caring for the new infant. Parents can ease a child through this stage by remembering that it is hard to be replaced when you are too young to know that there is enough love to go around. If it is not possible to get another adult to help, probably the best way to shorten the time of the regression is to join it, to say, "As soon as new baby goes to sleep, you will be my baby again and I will love you and care for you again just as I did when you were first born." If this doesn't help, get help.

Recycling to Reinforce Developmental Tasks

Children — even young children — have to recycle developmental tasks many times. The tasks of each stage are succinctly listed in "[Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children.](#)"

Since the developmental tasks that life presents to us are so deep and so complex, it would be naive to expect that children could complete learning them the first time through.

Recycling Being

At the time Elizabeth Crary, parent educator and author, was introduced to the theory of recycling, her daughter had just turned 3. Her daughter, a determined, independent child, had insisted on not being carried as soon as she could walk. She had also been feeding and dressing herself for some time

Shortly after her third birthday she wanted to go back and be babyish. Part of the day she wanted to be fed, carried, and dressed as if to reinforce her belief that it is okay for her to be alive.

Elizabeth, who was in a position to devote the time, patiently and with loving assurance, fed, carried, and dressed "her baby" for a time each morning. Elizabeth offered the following "Being" stage messages in behaviors, spoken words and songs. "I'm glad you are alive. You belong here. What you need is important to me. I'm glad you are you. You can grow at your own pace. You can

feel all of your feelings. I love you and I care for you willingly.” In about two weeks the babyish behavior was gone.

Elizabeth wondered if her daughter was recycling her “Being” tasks. This little girl had five friends her age. Elizabeth asked the parents of those friends what was going on with their children. Two children who had recently been presented with new siblings were also wanting to be fed, dressed and carried. Their parents insisted that they be big girls, grow up, and act like the big sisters. Their babyish behaviors lasted from six to nine months. The other 3-year-old children with no new sibling also had displayed babyish behaviors. You may want to observe the 3-year-olds you know and see if they fit anywhere in this picture.

Elizabeth decided to track possible recycling of infant or “Being” behaviors and reported that they are easily noticeable at six and twelve. This fits Pam Levin’s Cycle of Development theory that there is a natural rhythm of recycling that occurs every six or seven years.

Think of all the ways 6-year-olds need to be sure we are there for them as they start “big school.” If they want special help with dressing, certain foods, and more attention, this is a good time to give it and to reassure them that we love them and will care for and be there for them.

Elizabeth reported an amusing story of a friend’s 12-year-old recycling the “Being” stage “with new stuff added.” Picture this 12-year-old boy, lying on a sofa, drinking pop from a baby bottle and watching the Miss America Pageant. Recycling theory suggests that teenagers recycle all of the earlier stages with sexuality added. What a harmless way for this child to revisit an earlier stage.

Recycling Being, Doing, Thinking

Sometimes children recycle in dramatic ways if their development has been interrupted. When Carrie, age 4, was moved from a highly neglectful and abusive environment to a competent, caring foster home, she reacted with rebellion and suspicion for the first few days. The foster care she received was gently firm and consistently warm, loving and inviting, and apparently she decided to trust it or at least to give it a try. Abundant love and firm structure seemed to make it safe enough for her to be in touch with that innate drive to connect and achieve.

Her foster mom reported that Carrie started little and spent two or three weeks recycling each stage. First she spent a couple of weeks being rocked, sung to, bathed, dressed, and fed. She was probably not regressed because she continued to talk, did not lose toilet training, and sometimes fed herself. Foster mom wisely let Carrie take her time recycling this infant stage (Being).

Then Carrie started to respond to being read to, and soon she was exploring her environment as a toddler would: touching everything, tasting everything from a new food to her shoes and her pillow, dropping things almost as quickly as she picked them up. She seemed to delight in touch, wanting to pet the skin and hair of everyone she met. Mom deliberately encouraged the touching at a 4-year-old level by offering toys with different textures and teaching Carrie how to pet the dog. Carrie’s favorite activity during those weeks was going to a big fabric store where, with

freshly washed hands, she was allowed to walk through the store and touch the many textured bolts of fabric. (Doing stage)

Later Carrie did a spate of “no” saying and tantrums (“Independent” thinking). Then she moved to more normal 4-year-old behavior (“Identity and Power”). Carrie still revisited those earlier behaviors, but for increasingly shorter periods of time, and by age 5 was ready to start in a regular kindergarten class.

What helped Carrie? Let us theorize:

- Consistent love and structure?
- Being allowed to recycle earlier tasks at her own pace?
- Never being ridiculed or criticized for “acting little”?
- That her early damage was not so deep that she needed therapeutic support?
- That she was a particularly resilient child?
- That she and her foster family were a good temperament match?
- All of the above?

Many of us deal with children who are not abused and neglected. But we can learn some things from Carrie’s experience. When our children seem to regress, it is important for us to look for causes and empathize with the child, not criticize.

Whether parents view a child acting younger than his age with empathy or distress often depends upon whether they interpret the child’s behavior as regressing or as recycling.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Purpose: To examine the idea that children may recycle earlier tasks.

- Review the theory of recycling.
- Read or tell the examples of recycling included here. Add some of your own if you wish.
- Invite people to share stories that could illustrate recycling from their experience.
- With a poster or a handout, review the developmental tasks for the first six years. You may want to use the developmental charts from “[Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children.](#)”
- After the review of each stage, ask how that might look if it were being recycled by a school age child. For example, a 7-year-old who is easily distracted and can’t seem to finish things could be recycling the 6–18 months exploratory tasks. An 8-year-old who is pushing, saying no, and seems to have more trouble dealing with feelings than he did last year could be recycling 2-year-old separation tasks.

- Ask people to notice when their children might be recycling and to compare whether going along with it, ignoring it, or telling the child to snap out of it seems to be more supportive to the child's learning his or her developmental tasks.

ADOLESCENCE

When adolescent behavior is mercurial, what is going on?

My 14-year-old can act so grown up, and then suddenly he is as rebellious as a 2-year-old! What is going on?

What is a Parent to Do?

When a teenager engages in quick switches of attitudes and behaviors, wise parents first explore the possibility of external causes such as school stress, consuming crushes, dipping into drugs, or peer pressure. If external pressures are deemed causal, of course parents take supportive action.

If external pressures don't account for the mood swings, the source most likely is within the youth. During adolescence the hormonal changes are powerful. The physical and emotional discomfort generated by the body as it moves from the child state toward sexual, mental, emotional and spiritual adulthood are the source of many mood switches. Teens often feel competent and reasonable one moment and grossly immature the next.

The Rhythm of Recycling

There is a rhythm to recycling. That rhythm may be interrupted by a stressful or traumatic event such as moving or a death. Such stresses often trigger a quick recycle of earlier tasks: Being, Doing, Thinking, Identity and Power, and Structure. An individual will not necessarily recycle them in order and may revisit tasks several times. But without big stresses, or in spite of them, many people can trace six or seven year recycling patterns in their lives, and in some adolescents the pattern is easily recognizable. Of course the following examples will not fit for every child, but think about the behaviors and look for patterns in a teenager you know.

Puberty – Recycling “Being”

The onset of puberty (12- or 13-years-old) is usually a time to recycle Being — the original birth-to-6-months tasks of deciding to be and to ask (call out) to be taken care of. Of course, the young adolescent does not do the tasks in the same way the baby does, but sometimes the parent feels much as she did when the child was an infant. This was true for Hayden's mother.

As a 12-year-old, Hayden had not cared much about cleaning his room, but he had been reliable and responsible about his schedules for school, sports and music. About the time his voice started to change he became moody, wasn't sure if his friends liked him, and was angry at his mom if he

missed a practice session or forgot his homework. He wanted her to be there when he came home, although he could never be quite sure when that would be. When she asked him to clean his room he acted as if she were requesting the impossible. He would forget to do his laundry until every sock was dirty, and then be upset because his parents didn't provide him with clothing.

As Hayden's mom struggled to understand him, she wondered who this stranger was, much as she had wondered about her new infant. Watching Hayden struggle to become okay with his changing physical and emotional state, she sometimes felt as helpless as she had felt when he was an infant and she didn't know how to soothe him. Also, as this big guy leaned on her to care for him in ways she knew he could care for himself, she sometimes felt old familiar fatigue. But now she also had an annoyed impatience with his dependence.

When she was presented with the recycling theory, she guessed Hayden might be recycling the Being stage. She decided to do some of the things Hayden wanted and to do them in a loving, supportive way to support his recycling. She focused especially on his food. Other things she challenged him to problem-solve in order to support his growing adult capabilities.

Thirteen plus – Recycling “Doing”

Around 13-years-old, some children revisit the exploratory stage first visited when they were 6–18-months-old. Some of these youngsters spend lots of time on the floor or in games where their bodies are piled on top of each other. Some touch everything, pick it up, handle it, put it down in a different place. They leave cereal bowls in front of the TV and drop their clothes anywhere. They can create a messy house as quickly as a toddler. One of the things parents can do when children are recycling the Doing stage tasks is to remember that this stage is about exploring, not about finishing. They can also protect the young adolescent from overscheduling so there is adequate time for seemingly purposeless behavior, for hanging out. Leslie, not yet 14-years-old, had to have a guitar. If she could play the guitar her life would be complete. If there was no money for lessons she would learn by herself. But she must have a guitar, and a good one. It would be a friend for life.

Leslie's father, guessing that her unreasonableness signaled an episode of recycling, rented a guitar. Despite Leslie's initial wailing, she soon accepted the instrument and played it vigorously for three months. Then she realized what she “really needed” was a set of drums.

To support recycling “Doing,” parents provide teens with many opportunities to try out new, safe activities and remember that finishing or carrying through will not be important to them at times.

Fourteen – Recycling “Thinking”

At about 14-years-old, it is not uncommon for teenagers to recycle the negativity, resistance and fiercely independent thinking of the 2-year-old stage.

Amanda had always been an insistent child. At 14-years-old, she raised her determination to have things her own way to noisy, unrealistic demands alternated with stony, silent resistance.

Her parents decided to respond to her outbursts with calm insistence that she obey family rules and act like a contributing member of the family. They did not put her down or shout back. Instead they insisted that she think about what she really needed and about the effect of her behaviors on other people.

After a sudden outburst, her father commented that she looked and sounded like a 2-year-old. She looked surprised, thought a moment and said, "I felt like a 2-year-old." When Dad remarked that she must be learning new ways to handle her feelings and asked if she thought she would need to do more of these displays, she was thoughtful and then said, "Just a few." In fact, that was the last ten-decibel outburst.

Apparently when Amanda's outbursts were not acquiesced to or overpowered, but were accepted and understood just like a 2-year-old tantrum, Amanda was able to think beyond them, to do some more of that 2-year-old task of giving up the belief that she is the center of the world.

To support recycling the independent thinking and appropriate handling of feelings, parents can accept outbursts and selfish displays calmly and then insist on more grown-up behaviors.

Fifteen, Sixteen and Seventeen – Recycling "Power and Identity" with Teenage Tasks of "Separation and Sexuality" Added

As teens explore their new identities as sexual almost-adults and figure out how to be effective, several questions lie behind their sometimes perplexing behaviors.

"How do I get my needs met now? I no longer feel like a child and I see teens and adults in sexual games pushing or being pushovers, manipulating or pleasing manipulators, competing or withdrawing, or taking the wishes of others into account while still being clear about their own boundaries and values. Which will work for me? And how do I keep the values my family honors and still learn to stand separately from my parents?"

During Michael's recycling of the Power and Identity tasks, he was often as perplexing to his father as he was to himself. Sometimes he helped in the carpentry shop and other times he made it clear he did not, not, not plan to work with his hands. But would his dad please build a new top for his skate board?

All the maneuvers Michael was trying out in his peer group he also practiced on his folks, while vigorously protesting that they did not understand him. Within two days' time he pushed, manipulated, wheeled, threatened and withdrew. Michael was right. His parents did not understand him. Mom told Dad that Michael was so preoccupied with girls that he didn't care a fig about the family. But his parents did their best to keep communication lanes open and still insist that Michael observe family values.

To support 15- to 17-years-olds who are recycling "Power and Identity," getting accustomed to their sexuality, and starting to separate, parents can make sure their own needs are met, keep clear about family rules, go with the flow when it seems appropriate, and think about their own

interests at those ages. Perhaps relating well with their parents was not high on their list of priorities at that age either.

Seventeen and Eighteen and Sometimes Fifteen and Sixteen – Recycling “Structure” with “Separation and Sexuality” Added

During adolescence, teens practice and add a multitude of new intellectual, social and emotional skills. As they recycle the 6- to 12-year-old tasks of developing independent, internalized structure, they test the rules of their peer group and/or the media against the structures of the family. Teens may be encouraged by peers and the media to think that exploring sexuality equals sexual intercourse. It does not. A teen needs time to figure out what it means to him or her to become a man or a woman before adding intercourse. One reason to discourage early sexual activity is that it can become a preoccupation that delays or skews the recycling process.

Sometimes adolescents find the family rules and values silly, rigid, or out of date. Some of those judgments, of course, are true. Other times insisting on the irrelevance of some family rules is a strategy to help older teenagers separate, to declare their independence. At the same time they will cling tenaciously to other family values. Their choice of what to keep and what to reject may bring joy or consternation to their parents, often both.

Zach looked at the values of his family and found them to his liking, so he and his parents enjoyed fairly easygoing teen years. Sometimes he kept rules, broke rules, and forgot rules. Certainly he argued with his parents, particularly about China, but generally he asked for and accepted their support as he managed the challenges of school, sports, arts, social life and money management. However, as he neared the end of his senior year, he became preoccupied and withdrawn. He refused to talk about what he would do after high school. His parents worried. He said his future was something he had to figure out. His parents finally told him that if he didn't go on to some kind of school and instead stayed at home, he would have to pay room and board. Zach looked at them with disgust and said, “You don't understand anything! Like I'd be a couch potato?” and walked off.

Each teenager finds his or her own way to separate. But separate emotionally they must if they are to become autonomous adults. Some leave home to separate; some stay at home and become independent, contributing adults. Many focus their separation on challenging family rules. Adolescents who have a loving, supportive home do not look at it as a place to escape from. They may leave but not reject the family. However, some of those teens are reluctant to leave, and have to find ways to make their parents not okay and to make a loud declaration of independence. Michael was such a person.

To support older teens recycling of the 6- to 12-year-old's Structure tasks takes a willingness by the parents to let go of things that may be distasteful but are safe, and to hold fast in their own lives the values that have deep meaning for the family. This holding fast and continuing to love the son or daughter unconditionally opens the door for the young adult to establish positive adult to adult grown-up relationships with other family members.

One reason to hope adolescents don't leave home early is to give them the chance to recycle all of the tasks of birth through 12-years-old within the family system. If the family is unable to nurture and support them, living with some other family can be a helpful resolution. Living on the street *is not, does not* support the recycling needed during teen years.

Recycling or A Call for Help?

How do you know when a disturbing behavior is a symptom of recycling and when it is a call for help? Our general rule is that if an undesirable behavior is unusual and does not persist it is probably a recycling behavior. If it is constant, it is time for some help. A second rule is that if an adolescent is generally a well-balanced person, and the misbehavior annoys the parents but does no harm, it is probably recycling. If the behavior causes harm to the teen or the family or others, consider it a call for help.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Purpose: To help parents consider recycling behavior as part of the way an adolescent learns new skills or ways to use old skills in new ways.

- Subtract 6 or 12 from your child's age.
- Think about what was going on in the child's life then. *At 3 my 15-year-old was full of fantasy. He thought he could be anything, do anything. Now, yes, one day he is going to be a race car driver and the next a nuclear physicist.*
- Identify anything that was not going well at that age. *He was very pushy with other kids and snatched toys, more so than the other children in his play group.*
- Is he learning better ways to interact now?

GROUP ACTIVITY

Purpose: To identify behaviors that may indicate adolescent recycling.

- Present the theory of adolescent recycling.
- Give or ask the group to give one example of recycling for each age group.
- Ask each person to join a subgroup to focus on one stage.
- Ask each subgroup to present to the whole group a scenario or a role-play of one way recycling behavior in that stage might look, and a way that adults can respond supportively to that behavior.

ADULTHOOD

Recycling – Children Stimulate Parents to Update Old Developmental Tasks

Growth is not a straight line for any of us. We seem to move ahead, fall back, and move ahead again. Human growth is a cyclical process and *to recycle is to revisit in a cyclic manner the tasks of previous stages in order to move to new levels of competence, complexity, or sophistication*. As adults we experience this in small ways all of the time and perhaps in dramatic, transformational ways at the transition times we call mid-life crisis and again when accepting the role of elder. Living with children also challenges us to do our recycling, to heal old wounds and to grow up in new ways.

Parenting Transforms Your Life

Besides bringing love and joy, the arrival of the first child changes parents' lives in other dramatic ways often summed up as less time, less sleep, less sex. But while part of that major shift of focus from ourselves to our child is stressful, parenthood adds special breadth and wonderful depth to our lives. Our interactions through the years with these children whose lives we guide, but who also guide ours, demand that we stretch and grow.

In "Growing With Your Child," Elin Schoen says, "... the idea that our children provide us, as they grow, with successive opportunities that we might not otherwise have had for working through conflicts dating from when we were growing up, and thereby moving on in our personal growth, is probably as close as anyone has come to formulating a real psychodynamic of parenthood."

To learn more about the many ways parents are affected and changed by the experience of parenting, read: "Growing With Your Child: Reflections on Parent Development," by Elin Schoen, NY: Main Street Books, Doubleday, 1995.

In her helpful book, Schoen documents many examples of the ways in which adults, in response to their children, experience increased creativity, self-esteem and competence. Think about Schoen's observations and add the theory of recycling.

Recycling, A Theory of Lifelong Growth

As children present us with each new level of growth, they trigger us to examine, to rework, to refurbish whatever they are learning, to recycle the developmental tasks they are exploring. Recycling, this revisiting old developmental tasks to update them to meet the demands of adult life, can be motivated by stimuli other than our children. In her book, "Becoming the Way We Are," Pam Levin suggests that there is a natural internal recycling rhythm of six or seven years.

In addition, we recycle tasks in response to external events. For example, the need to revisit identity formation and answer anew those old questions, "Who am I? Who are they?" and "What does that mean?" pushes its way to the surface regularly. Every time we experience a major life change or walk through a new life door — when we start school, leave school, get a new job,

marry, have a child, divorce, lose someone close to us, retire, become a widow or widower — those old questions pop up demanding updated answers.

Each of these recycling experiences may be rather smooth if the new identity is one we desire and our original sense of identity is well grounded, or if the modeling from our family of origin for handling that change is helpful.

The experience will be less smooth, maybe downright bumpy, if our first swing at the task was interrupted by some untoward event or was somehow unsatisfactory.

Recycling in Response to Our Children

This author has observed many parents who reexamine their identity as they parent 3- to 5-year-olds who are busy trying on different ways of behaving as they push toward formulating their own identity. Again, if the parents' identity challenges were satisfactorily met in their own childhood, they may find it easy to guide, empathize with, and enjoy the preschoolers as they try on roles, explore ways of resolving conflicts, and try out ways of being leaders and followers. At the same time, parents will be refurbishing their own sense of identity in ways that enhance not only their parenting, but also their careers and other relationships.

If, for whatever reason, one's own childhood journey was fraught with events that prohibited a more or less satisfactory resolution of these developmental tasks, one may react with much more intensity and even with non-supportive parenting behaviors around those issues. Parents may become too controlling, too permissive, or may feel overly anxious.

Adam's Father Left — Unfinished Business at Age Two

When Adam was 2-years-old, the age at which he was vigorously asserting his own separate psychological position, his father left. It was as if the wrong person separated. When Adam's own son was 2-years-old, Adam experienced extreme distress over his son's new independence and didn't have easy, automatic ways to guide the child through his "no" saying and his tantrums.

Intense distress over a facet of our child's growth can be viewed as a signal that we need to give some extra attention to our need to grow up again in that area. Adam may do this by himself, by deliberately being aware of what he is doing and of getting what he needs, or he may use the help of friends, a support group, a parenting class, or a counselor.

The Not So Difficult Eights

One clue to a need to give special support to our recycling is the awareness that at some age our child seems difficult for us.

Aileen enjoyed caring for her children when they were young. But when her oldest child was 8-years-old, she felt burdened and unsuccessful as a mother. Aileen decided that 8 was a difficult age. Her decision was reinforced when her second child was troublesome as an 8-year-old, although he was not as hard to understand as his older brother. When her third child turned 9,

Aileen realized she had rather enjoyed the 8-year-old and wondered what had happened to “the difficult 8s.”

Intrigued, Aileen asked her mother what had happened in their family the year she was 8. Her mother recalled a very difficult year with illness, financial worries, and a painful betrayal. Not much time to care for an 8-year-old.

The differences in Aileen’s experiences with her three 8-year-olds may have been due to their differences in temperament, but Aileen guessed, when she learned about the idea of recycling, that it was also due to the growing and healing she had done as her sons triggered her to redo, in a better way, the 8-year-old tasks of recycling independent thinking and handling feelings.

Mother’s Absence – Trauma at 17 Months

Sometimes when a child, especially a child of the same sex as the parent, hits a certain age, it can set off a strong emotion about an old loss. If we don’t understand the intensity of our emotion or the timing of it, the question, “What went on when I was my child’s age?” may be helpful.

When Mary’s daughter was 17-months-old, Mary was overcome with a deep sadness that she had no explanation for and couldn’t seem to shake. When a friend asked, “What happened to you at your daughter’s age?” Mary replied, “Nothing special.” Then she remembered the family stories about the time her mother left for a month to take care of her dying father and how despondent baby Mary had been. An aunt calculated from Grandpa’s death date that Mary would have been about 17-months-old. Mary felt better after she completed her grieving about her infant loss of connection with her mother.

Boarding School – Loss of Control

When Paul’s son was ready to start first grade, Paul became so depressed that it interfered with his ability to think, to accomplish things, to finish projects. He had the feeling that he didn’t really understand what was going on and he felt out of control. A year before he had been firmly in control of his job and enjoying it, and the job hadn’t changed. When Paul got a negative work review he sought the help of a counselor. Their discussions led nowhere until the counselor asked, “What happened to you when you were your son’s age?” Paul went suddenly pale and said quietly, “My parents were missionaries in Asia and I was sent to France to boarding school. I didn’t understand why and I felt completely out of control for years. Maybe that’s why I’ve become such a control freak. But it isn’t working now.”

Paul worked through his grief about being separated from his family, his performance at work improved, and he had more energy to parent his son.

One of the gifts that our children give us is the chance to enhance tasks we learned well. Another gift is the push to rework what did not go well the first time around.

Using Recycling to Help Us Understand Our Child's Behavior

Another elegant outcome of our propensity to recycle what our children are doing is the clues it can give us about what is going on with them.

Janice told her parenting group about her 18-month-old daughter Katlin's sudden change in behavior. Usually easygoing and agreeable, Katlin had been cranky at day care for days in a row and extra demanding at home. Group members asked Janice what was different.

"Well, I've been forgetting to take her blanket. She may be teething again. She is over her cold, so that isn't it. The other children at day care are a bit older than she is and are pushing like 2-year-olds do. Maybe she is imitating them."

One member asked, "Do you think it might be that she misses the comfort of her blanket?"

"Maybe."

"The teeth?"

"Could be. Anybody got any other ideas?"

"Well, she is moving toward the 2-year-old stage when children begin to learn that they are not the center of the universe and it makes them mad. Could that be it?"

"Well, that makes me mad! I hate that in my life right now!"

The first questions Janice had answered in a quiet, even voice. On the last one she shifted in her chair, set her jaw, and spoke vehemently. Could it be that Janice is closely in tune with her little daughter and is reflecting what is most pressing for Katlin? It is worth watching. Meanwhile, Janice can help Katlin start to deal with not being the center of everything by learning about delayed gratification. Janice can offer these statements to her daughter: "When ... then you ..." or "After ... you can ..."

Janice can also learn new things about how to be important in her world without needing to be the controlling center of it.

Always Another Chance

This is the wonderful exchange of parenting. With our guidance our children learn the skills they need, and with their nudging we enhance old skills and are signaled to heal old wounds. The result is permanent changes in our attitudes and behaviors and interests.

We may even be able to break an old family cycle of abuse and neglect as we change the way we parent our children and the way we care for ourselves.

GROUP ACTIVITY

I. Do Parents Recycle Tasks Their Children Are Doing?

Purpose: To examine the theory of recycling against our own lives.

- Present the theory of recycling and the idea that parents are apt to recycle what their children are going through.
- Present the group with a handout or a poster review of the tasks of children's developmental stages. You can use the developmental charts in "[Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children.](#)"
- Ask each parent to examine the tasks for the stage his or her child is in and notice if any of those resonate with something going on for the adult at home or at work, something that is emotionally charged with excitement or enjoyment or resistance or resentment.
- Ask people to share their observations in small groups or large, depending on the number of participants.
- Ask people to share their responses to the theory of recycling, remembering that a theory is not a fact, it is a model devised to help us understand our own and other people's attitudes, feelings and behaviors.

II. Can our intensity about a recycling task help us understand what is going on with our child?

Purpose: To consider whether intense feelings of joy, anxiety, or resistance to a child's developmental tasks can help us understand that child.

- Read the story about Janice and Katlin.
- Ask if someone who is currently having a problem with a child is willing to let the group ask questions and give suggestions.
- Ask the group to watch for differences in the intensity of the person's responses to the suggestions and questions.
- After everyone has had the chance to ask a question or make a suggestion, ask people to share their observations on intensity.
- Ask the person with the problem to take this information home and see if it is helpful in the resolution of the problem.

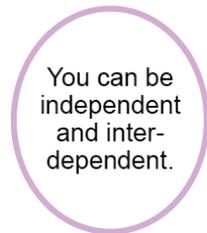
PART V.

**HISTORY AND BACKGROUND ON
DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS**

QUESTION 21.

WHO IDENTIFIED THE DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS?

Jean Illsley Clarke and Connie Dawson, with the help of developmental theorists and of many, many more people, identified the Developmental Affirmations. Connie Dawson devised the whole Integration set for the Preparing for the End of Life stage.



You can be independent and interdependent.

Interdependence – Stage 7

DIGGING DEEPER: READ ABOUT OTHER CONTRIBUTORS.

Carole Gesme tracked and tested the Affirmations through each developmental stage.

Some of the messages were gifts from people who recognized a hole in the stages lists or who helped to find the right words. Elaine Childs Gowell contributed, “You can trust your intuition to help you decide what to do.” (Structure, Stage 5).

During workshops in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, America, Canada and Asia, participants offered many suggestions.

Through the years, countless numbers of people have offered ideas and wording, and we (Jean Illsley Clarke and Connie Dawson) are deeply grateful to you all.

The origins of the affirmations are described in detail in the article “The History of Affirmations: Give us words,” WE Volume 6 Issue 4.

THE HISTORY OF AFFIRMATIONS: GIVE US WORDS

by Jean Illsley Clarke (WE Vol 6, No.4)

“We all want to be good parents, but we don’t know how. Put words in our mouths.” My husband Dick stopped by my desk, put his hand on my shoulder, and made that request several times while I was writing “Self-Esteem: A Family Affair.” He may have thought he was doing that for himself, but it always helped me focus on the purpose of the book. Words. Where would I find those words? I needed them myself. Not generalizations, not admonitions, not vague theory, but specific target words, bare bones words that would help me remember what I was supposed to be doing as a parent.

I walked in the daytime and tossed and turned at night trying to get my mind around those words. Gradually they began to take shape. Words to build self-esteem, but those words are not enough. What if we had a set of words with special ways to say you are lovable and capable at each age? What if we also had words for each developmental stage to tell parents what to do, what to celebrate, what to insist upon, what to give permission for? That would be good. It would be even better if both of those needs could be wrapped into one set.

I had read Sondra Ray’s “I Deserve Love,” (1976), the only affirmation book on the shelves at that time, and I knew that what I wanted was a set of developmentally based affirmations. I knew I could formulate those words, but I also knew it would take a long time. The publisher was pushing for the manuscript and most of the pieces of “Transactional Analysis” (Berne, 1961) theory that I wanted to translate into lay language were in place. Each chapter/story focused on one development stage and the theory pieces were chosen to support growth in that stage.

Naming the Stages

I had decided on the age/stage designations — 0 to 6 months as first stage and 6–18 months as the second, rather than Erikson’s (1964) 0–18 month “Basic Trust versus Mistrust” stage, because the experience of parenting a baby who stays in one place versus one who gets into everything demands different skills.

Parents helped me name the stages. I was teaching parenting classes while I was writing the book. The people I was working with didn’t find stage titles such as “Industry versus Inferiority” or “Object Constancy” easy to remember, so I searched for simple, lay, task designators. Parents in several classes were willing to think about how words reflected what they experienced with their children. We finally settled on:

- Being (0–6 months)
- Doing (6–18 months)
- Thinking (18 months–3 years)
- Power & Identity (3–6 years)

- Structure (6–12 years)
- Identity, Sexuality & Separation (adolescence)

I know the names are not parallel word forms, but they work.

So, the Transactional Analysis theory pieces and the stage names were in place, but I needed the affirmations in order to finish the stories.

Beginning Affirmations

Then, one bright day, I found Pamela Levin’s therapeutic “permissions” in her 1974 book, “Becoming the way we are: A transactional guide to personal development.” There was a set for each of the stages of childhood, but none for adults. I knew that, strictly speaking, some of the messages were not affirmations. They contained some “don’ts” and they didn’t have as many love messages as I wanted, but they were a wonderful start. I took Pam’s messages to my classes and the parents said, “Yes! Let us have them!”

When I asked Pam if I could use her permissions as affirmations for parents, she said, “I have never thought of using them that way!” She was enthusiastic and supportive, and her permissions were published as affirmations in the “Self-Esteem: A Family Affair” book in 1978. In a postface to the book I explained the meaning of each permission when used as an affirmation. They were also featured in the “Self-Esteem: A Family Affair Leader Guide” (1981).

Recycling Theory

In that book I wrote about recycling. We are, according to the theories put forth by Erik Erikson (1959, 1964), stimulated by some natural rhythm of growth to upgrade earlier developmental tasks throughout our lifetime. Pam Levin named this process “recycling” and it is a theory that fits my life experience. As a therapist, Pam observed that people are triggered to recycle earlier stages by life events such as starting a new job, losing a friend, marriage, divorce, or death of a loved one. I, as a parent educator, noticed that people are also triggered by their children to recycle a stage their child is growing through.

Affirmations for Adults

Pam’s messages are very supportive of the tasks and experiences of adult recycling, and although I personally used the messages to support my own recycling, I also needed a set of adult level affirmations. I remembered the work of Havighurst and Erikson (1959) which had made such an impression on me a decade before, and added the then-current work of Levinson (1978) and McGill (1980). Fortunately, I was able to attend a conference on adult development at the University of Kansas. I listened avidly to a variety of researchers and theorists on adult development and checked out my affirmations for adults against those several theories. Although the presenters were prestigious and included names like Gould, Freund-Lowenstein, and Stokes, I confess I was single-minded about my task and paid far more attention to whether the theories helped make sense of my affirmations than to just who said what.

Developing the Educational Developmental Affirmations

At the same time I was working on the adult affirmations, I was collecting affirmations for children. As I worked with a broad socioeconomic range of parents, I felt pushed to create affirmations that did not include “don’ts” and that did not need interpretation.

I was working slowly, wanting to be sure they were “right” and knowing there was no real way to be sure. The push to finish came from a mom in December 1985. I reported it in the September 1986 issue of my newsletter, WE.

I recall with discomfoting clarity the night I was doing a workshop for parents and students in a junior high school. I has posted an early rendition of two sets of affirmations for the stages “Being” and “Structure.” It was not long before Christmas. One Mom rushed in, sank into a chair and said, “Well Jean, what good stuff do you have for us tonight?” I pointed to the posters. She read, “You don’t have to hurry,” and snorted, “That’s a lie!” Then she read, “You can do it your way,” and sighed, “That’s another lie.” I said, “Wait, let me explain what those mean.” “I’m busy,” she exploded, “Why don’t you say what you mean in the first place?” “I’m working on that,” I mumbled. “Well,” she pushed, “make it top priority.” I did.

There were many sources and contributors to my work:

- My own children and their friends
- Memories of readings from the Gesell Institute (1974), that had been helpful as I was raising my own children. However, I enjoyed my own 2-year-olds, so I never could stand the idea of the “Terrible Twos” and I’m proud that my developmental audio tape is called “The Terrific Twos” (Clarke, 1981)
- My own life experiences, remembered or recalled through regressive work
- The wisdom of therapist friends who worked from a developmental model, especially Pam Levin, Elaine Childs-Gowell, Jean Wiger, Russell Osnes, Maggie Lawrence, Gail Nordeman and Jean Maxwell
- My reading of several developmental theorists including Selma Fraiberg (1959) and Naomi Golan (1981). The Series of Comparative Charts of Psychological Theory — No 1: Child Development, researched and compiled by Val Magner, helped me sort and compare the ideas from Mary Sheridan, Jean Piaget, Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, Erik Erikson, Mavis Klein, Jacqui Schiff and Pam Levin

I called the resulting six sets of developmental affirmations for children Educational Affirmations. They are designed to be used as first-time-around messages. That they turn out to support adults in their recycling tasks is a bonus.

Testing the Affirmations

The affirmations were tested for about two years. I gave them to parents and adjusted wording in response to parents’ questions and suggestions. Preschool teachers, school teachers, children and

adolescents also tested them. I kept charts to be sure that each set was examined by five or more testers. People were willing to help. It was wonderful.

When the entire set was almost finished, it felt as if there was one hole in the adult affirmations and I still needed to do a final test of the whole set with a young adult. Serendipity. My son Wade was 23 at the time and he wanted to borrow my car for a trip east. My offer: If he would drive me to a conference in Chicago and would work on the affirmations on the way, he could use my car. Deal! It was fascinating. Between us we designed a model for examining each affirmation in a variety of ways from his young adult perspective. He chose five young adult friends whose personalities and family situations varied widely and whom he knew well. One friend at a time, we went through each affirmation with these questions:

1. How strongly does he/she hold this belief now?
2. If strongly, how is that reflected in his/her life now?
3. What effect might that have on his/her life 15 years from now? 30 years from now?
4. If it is not a strongly held belief, how does that affect his/her life now?
5. If he/she continues in that disbelief, what effect will that have on his/her life 15 years from now? 30 years from now?

This exercise consumed the whole eight hour drive and we entered Chicago with his stamp of approval on all 53 affirmations, but with agreement that something was still missing from the adult set.

I said goodbye to my son and found my way into the conference venue, confident that I would soon see someone I knew. My friend, Elaine Childs-Gowell, rushed up to me with these words: "Jean, I have a new affirmation: You can trust your inner wisdom!" Laughter, sigh, relief, thankfulness. The missing affirmation. Elaine welcomed me to insert it in my list. Interestingly, the adult affirmations were handwritten and there was a space at the point where the new affirmation fit perfectly in the flow of messages.

Interdependence

You can
trust your
inner
wisdom.

The Educational Affirmations were first published in 1986 in the September *WE* and in the six "Help! For Parents" books (Clarke, 1986) that I co-authored/edited with 18 parent educator colleagues. Those books have now been combined into two volumes, "Help! For Parents of Children from Birth to Five" and "Help! For Parents of School Age Children and Teenagers" (Clarke, et al, 1993).

COMPARISONS – You Affirmations Versus I Affirmations

The major difference between the Educational Affirmations and other sets of affirmations, besides the developmental base, is the use of *you* instead of *I*. The theory behind I affirmations is well known: get a person to repeat an “I am ...” message enough times and the belief will set in and override the old message that said, “I’m not ...” I have never been comfortable with one person telling another to say, “I am ...” Berne’s Ego State theory from his 1961 book “Transactional Analysis” helped me to understand and articulate my discomfort.

Let us say, as an example, that I have a deep belief that I do not belong, then you tell me to say “I belong here” twenty times a day. I object.

- First — No matter how much goodwill you have toward me, this is *your* message, not mine.
- Second — Saying your prescribed “I belong here” can set up dissonance in me and even more anxiety, discomfort or depression than I had before.
- Third — If I try to say it and give up, I have added another failure, another proof that I don’t belong here.

If instead you say to me, “You belong here,” I can listen to you with all three of my Ego States: Parent, Adult and Child. My Parent Ego State might say, “She seems to mean that!” My Adult might say, “It seems reasonable that I ought to belong here.” My Child can say, “No way!” But the thinking, the internal dialogue between the Ego States, has started. Then if the Parent says, “This fits with my values,” and my Adult says, “This seems to be a healthy message,” the affirmation now belongs to me. I have chosen it. I can say to my child within, “You belong here.”

My Child can argue or disbelieve, but if my Parent and Adult Ego States unite to insist on giving the message and deliberately choose to behave as if I belong here, eventually my Child will spontaneously say, “I belong here.” The belief will not be secure at first, but with constant Parent and Adult reinforcement, the belief will come. If this does not happen, it is a sign that I need more than self-affirmation. I need the added strength and wisdom of a counselor or therapist.

Being

You
belong
here.

You does not always start the affirmation message. Sometimes it says “I feel this for you,” as in “I love who *you* are.” That is very different from telling someone to say “I love who I am”.

I feel strongly about the presumptuousness of telling people to say, “I ...”. It is one of the reasons I was first attracted to Pam Levin’s (1974) *you* messages.

Identity & power



I love
who
you are.

The Love Affirmations

The 54 educational affirmations include a message for each stage that says, “I love you and support your tasks in this developmental state.” Unconditional love for being the age you are!

- *I love you and I care for you willingly.* (0–6 months)
- *I love you when you are active and when you are quiet.* (6–18 months)
- *You can become separate from me and I will continue to love you.* (18 months–3 years)
- *I love who you are.* (3–6 years)
- *I love you even when you differ: I love growing with you.* (6–12 years)
- *My love is always with you. I trust you to ask for support.* (12–18 years)
- *Your love matures and expands.* (adult)
- *You are lovable at every age.* (adult)

These special love affirmations were described in the February 1987 WE and later in the “Affirmation Ovals, 139 Ways to Give and Get Affirmations” (1988) book that Carole Gesme and I wrote.

The Love Game

Carole Gesme saw the power in and the need for the love affirmations and decided to make them available in a potent way. Using a Monopoly-type board, Carole created The Love Game in 1988. It is spectacular. People who might have trouble saying or hearing the love messages can manage it when they are rolling dice, moving markers, and drawing activity cards. Playing the game the whole way through (about an hour), or even for 10 minutes, gives one a bath of unconditional love messages that creates a soothing and healing experience. The Love Game is widely used not only by families but also in adolescent treatment centers

Carole is an inventor of games and she was already using the affirmations in her games Ups and Downs With Feelings — Ages 6 to Adult (1985) and Ups and Downs With Feelings — Ages 3–6 (1985).

Ways That Affirmations Have Been Used

In addition to their use in books, in journal articles, and in puzzles, there are as many ways to use the affirmations as your imagination and creativity present.

Since 1985, Carole Gesme has been offering the affirmation messages in rainbow colored ovals in a variety of sizes. These are easy to carry in your pocket and to play games with. The stickers come in ovals and also in fanciful figures. The latter were developed in response to teachers who wanted engaging stickers to put on students' papers. On earlier versions, the recommended ages of focus for each set of tasks was included on the ovals. When junior high age children refused to use ovals with younger ages on them (declining to understand the concept of recycling), Carole removed the ages. Adults can easily remember the stage ages by relating them to the sequence of colors in the rainbow.

A teenager put large love ovals on her bedroom ceiling to remind herself that she is lovable in spite of acne and adolescent ups and downs.

The affirmation posters hang on the walls of a high school special education room. A student asked that the poster be moved higher on the wall so he could see them all from his seat.

On the first day of school, fifth graders found large love ovals placed cleverly in their room. "You belong here" was on the door. "You can grow at your own pace" was in the plant. "What you need is important to me" was over the water fountain. During the following weeks other sets were similarly presented.

A middle-aged woman was introduced to the affirmations in a workshop. She thought, "I'm doing just fine as an adult, but I've never heard most of those messages. I want to find a way to get them." She used them to help heal the residue from having grown up in a family with alcoholism.

The "Being" affirmation poster hung on the wall of the hospital room. Whoever came into the room pulled an affirmation from the bowl on the dresser or chose one from the poster and read it to the patient during his last months of Lou Gehrig's disease.

Parents put large love affirmation ovals on the walls of the nursery to remind them about what the baby needs.

Interdependence



You are
lovable
at every
age.

Being



What you
need is
important
to me.

A teacher in a bilingual program asks his class to translate one affirmation a week from English to Spanish or vice versa. The week-long emphasis on that affirmation builds language skills and bolsters student's self-esteem at the same time.

Another Spanish teacher uses bookmarks with English affirmations on one side and Spanish on the other.

I first presented the affirmations in a public workshop in Indianapolis in 1987. In the audience was composer Darrell Faires. He and his colleague, Joy Roberts, approached me after the workshop to say that Darrell would compose and they would publish songs based on the affirmations. Imagine! I was experiencing first-time-presented-in-public-to-a-professional-audience-how-would-the-affirmations-be-accepted apprehension, and here was someone who was going to write songs about them. I must have stuttered because Darnell informed me that he was not asking my permission, he was telling me. Six weeks later, the first audio tape arrived. The testing process echoed the way the affirmations had been tested. After months of testing and rewriting, the album was complete — four tapes with 63 songs, two tapes of accompaniment music only, words, and sheet music. Astounding. They are published by Shalom Publications (Faires, 1988).

I have had interesting experiences with these songs. After they were tested and finalized, I set about learning them by playing them on the car radio while I was driving. This meant I heard song after song, again and again. While I find them exceedingly powerful used separately and in the right setting, listening to one after another of these songs with no segues, and in different keys, sometimes felt like too many odd colored jelly beans. Nevertheless, I soon discovered that some were great favorites. I cherish *"I love who you are."* I love *"Welcome to this world."* And I am deeply touched by *"My love is always with you."* I also noticed that there were some that I didn't care for. One of those was *"I'm glad you're alive."* It goes, "I'm glad you're alive and knowing and growing, I love you very much. I'm glad you're alive." I thought it was inane and told my colleagues that we would surely have to have Darrell change it. I was overruled. People said no, that it was fine, leave it alone. So I thought, "That's okay, I don't have to like all of them." But each time it came around on the tape, I was careful not to listen to it.

I'm Glad You're Alive

Sometime later my son Wade, the young adult affirmation tester, who was living with his best friend Eric, came to see me. He dropped his great frame down beside me and said in a low voice, "Eric is dead. He died about 2 o'clock this morning on my motorcycle." We talked for a bit and I, of course, went straight into denial. "Wade, Erick couldn't be dead." "Yes Mom, his is." "But Wade, Eric is an excellent athlete and a good rider." "Yes, Mom, I know, and he is dead." Wade had known it for several hours and had already visited the site of the accident.

I then did what I have done many times before when I first learned of the death of a family member or a friend. While my mouth was still in denial, “This couldn’t be true,” part of my brain started making a coping list. “Let’s see, this is Wednesday, the funeral won’t be until Saturday because he has a brother in the Marines and they’ll have to get him home. Who are the people I should call? I must remember to order flowers, etc.” These two things going on simultaneously were familiar to me, but with Eric, there was added a third dimension that

was very different. Way back in my head a choir of angels, with the most gorgeous voices you can imagine, started to sing. You can guess what they were singing. “I’m glad you’re alive and knowing and growing. I love you very much. I’m glad you’re alive.” The song went on unbidden for about 20 minutes. Of course you know what it was about. While I was denying and while I was making my coping list, I was also celebrating that Wade was still alive, that on Saturday our family would go to the funeral and would walk out with a live son. Eric’s family would go home without their boy. After that experience I thought much more about how songs work and have noticed that songs can go straight to the heart and have a quality of circumventing the denying brain that spoken words do not have.

Being

I’m glad
you are
alive.

What You Need Is Important

Another song experience occurred on a day that a song told me what to say. I was talking with Troy, a young editor who was working on the “Growing Up Again” book. We were pushing each other to wrap up some final adjustments so the book could go to print. It was Monday morning, we were on the phone, and the conversation was not going well. I kept hearing the song, “*What you need is important*” in the back of my head — “What you need is important, important, important. What you need is important, very important to me,” over and over again. I thought, “What is this about?” So I asked Troy, “Is there something you need today?” He responded in a startled voice, “Why do you ask?” I countered with, “Oh, I was just wondering if there was something you need.” He sighed, “Well, yes. There is a lot that I need. I came into work very tired because I had moved to a new apartment this weekend, and when I got here I found that my office had been moved from one room to another. All of my things had been picked up and just dumped into an empty office and I can’t find anything.” I offered, “How would it be if you took

Being

What you
need is
important
to me.

half an hour just to sort a few things out and then call me back?” “Oh, would you mind? Oh, that would be wonderful. I don’t know how you knew to ask that, but thanks.”

I Love You When You’re Active and When You’re Quiet

Other people have reported similar experiences where a song has popped up in their heads to help them solve a problem or to fortify an intuition. I also had an interesting healing experience with one of the songs. I had been doing a spot of therapeutic work on the issue of over-scheduling. I wasn’t thinking about that as I entered my car for an hour-long drive to a meeting. I recall slipping the affirmation tape into the player and fast forwarding to the song “*I love you when you’re active and when you’re quiet*” because I had wanted to sing it at a workshop and I couldn’t remember it all.

Doing

I love you
when you
are active and
when you
are quiet.

I found the spot on the tape. I listened to the song, and then turned the tape off and tried to sing it. I couldn’t remember it. I did this several times. Irritated, I determined that I would listen to it enough times to learn it. That didn’t seem to work. I wondered why I couldn’t learn it. I decided that it was the fault of the song. Darrell had written a song in which the intervals were too difficult to sing. I listened carefully and the intervals were not too difficult. Then I decided that Darrell had written a song that didn’t flow well. I listened again; it flowed. I sang it out loud, very loud, and I realized, as I listened to myself, that I had changed the words! The song is: “I love you when you’re active and when you’re quiet too. Busy, busy, busy or very quiet. I love you, yes I do.” I was singing it: “I love you when you’re active and when you’re active too. Busy, busy, busy or very active, I love you, yes I do.” I was amazed! The difficulty I had been having with over-scheduling was probably echoing my growing-up situation which I had just sung about. My mother was uncomfortable if children were quiet. If my brother and I were quiet she would call to us from the next room, “What are you doing? What kind of mischief are you in? Why are you quiet?” We even learned to color noisily! When I tried to sing the song again in the correct way, it was very hard to get out those quiet words. I used the help from the song to finish off that piece of healing very quickly.

Growing Up Again

The affirmations are an integral part of the book “Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children” which I wrote with Connie Dawson, published in 1989. Connie and I hope that this is the bridge book between self-help books and parenting books. Our premise is that adults need to be careful not to neglect themselves while they are raising their children, and not to neglect their children while they are doing their own recovery or healing or growing up again. The affirmations are featured in the dual use of programming for children and as support for recycling adult needs.

There are seven charts in the “Growing Up Again” book, one for each developmental stage: Being, Doing, etc. Each chart offers concise but thorough information on psychosocial growth for that stage. The affirmations support the interrelated jobs of the child, helpful parent behaviors, and activities that reinforce the adults in their recycling or growing up again. There have been many requests for permission to copy these charts or to include them in other parenting programs.

The affirmations are also a regular part of the activities presented in the “Growing Up Again Leader Guide” (1981).

Video Tapes

In 1991, I got a call from Marilyn Cohen saying that the University of Washington’s Telecommunications Center was going to produce a set of video tapes for use with Spanish-speaking migrant workers. These tapes would be the first that were produced in the United States in Spanish featuring people whose first language was Spanish. Previous films had been made in English with a Spanish voice overlay or Spanish subtitles. Would I like to be a consultant to the project? Of course I was delighted to. One of the things that pleased me was the plan to base the videos on my work, not to translate directly. Marilyn wanted to use the developmental approach and the affirmations. Estela Carrera Plotz, with the help of several other people, started the translation of the affirmations. Estela, who was a trained “Self-Esteem: A Family Affair” facilitator, starred in the films. The project was named “Platica de Autoestima.”

In 1993, a leader guide to go with the films was completed. Estela, Nat Houtz, Kate Calhoun, and Carmen Michelson created the guide, and Teresa Ruiz de Somocurcio-Kamrath did the final editing and was responsible for the completion of that project. Carole Gesme published the affirmations in Spanish for her class, so participants now have a choice of English or Spanish affirmation ovals.

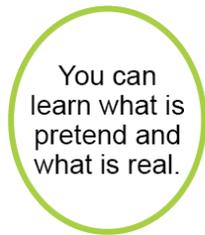
Also in 1993, Marilyn Cohen and the Telecommunications Center created four videos based on “Growing Up Again.” Those videos feature the affirmations in English.

Readers of “Growing Up Again” identified with the chapter on overindulgence and asked for more information. In answer to that call, Dr. David Bredehoft, Dr. Connie Dawson and I launched the Overindulgence Research Project in 1996. The findings from the Overindulgence Research Project were published in “How Much is Enough? Everything You Need to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Responsible and Respectful Children” (2003) and revised in “How Much is Too Much? Raising Likeable, Responsible, Respectful Children in the Age of Overindulgence” (2014). The Developmental Affirmations are embedded in the “How Much is Too Much” book and leaders guide as a guide to raise competent, capable, and resilient children while avoiding overindulgence and spoiling.

QUESTION 22.

WHO FIELD-TESTED THE AFFIRMATIONS?

Each developmental set of affirmations was field-tested by people who were specialists working with that developmental stage. They included parents, teachers, nurses, social workers, clergy, coaches and therapists.



You can learn what is pretend and what is real.
Identity and Power – Stage 4

DIGGING DEEPER: LEARN MORE ABOUT THE WHO AND THE HOW OF THE TESTERS.

Early education teachers interviewed and observed the behavioral responses of pregnant women who used the Becoming (pre-birth) messages. Becky Kejander (nurse) and Kath Hammerseng (childcare teacher) collected data from colleagues who had infants and toddlers and were using messages from the following stages: Becoming (fetus); Being (Stage 1: 0 to 6 months); Doing (Stage 2: 6 to 18 months); Thinking (Stage 3: 18 months to 3 years). Carole Gesme and Karen Zimmerman (parent educators) worked primarily with toddlers and preschool children and used messages from Power and Identity, (Stage 4). For the rest of the stages — Structure (Stage 5), and Identity, Sexuality and Separation (Stage 6), plus the End of Life stage, the testers (teachers and developmentalists) added interviews and conversations to their observations.

The testing of young adults used an interview format that included guesses about the future. “What will your life be like 5, 10, 15, 25, 55 years from now if you live by these affirmations? And if you don’t?”

QUESTION 23.

WHEN WERE THE DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS IDENTIFIED?

The Developmental Affirmations were identified over the course of many years, from 1976 until the present. It is important to keep the affirmations current. In 2018, Max Herzberg, a graduate student in the Department of Child Development, University of Minnesota, checked all of the affirmations and the “Jobs of the Child and Adults” lists to be sure they are consistent with current brain research.

The affirmations are a work in progress. I hope they will always be examined and added to.



You can build and examine your commitments to your values and causes, your roles and tasks.

Interdependence – Stage 7

DIGGING DEEPER: LEARN MORE ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE AFFIRMATIONS

Learn more about the history of the Affirmations in Question 21: Who identified the Developmental Affirmations?

QUESTION 24.

WHY WERE THEY IDENTIFIED?

- In response to the requests from many parents and members of the health care professions.
- To see if it would help busy adults to hear simple reminders of ways to be supportive of the child's and their own important learning at each stage.
- To remind parents and other caregivers to provide an environment in which people can absorb those learnings.



You can explore who you are and find out who other people are.

Identity and Power – Stage 4

DIGGING DEEPER: LEARN MORE ABOUT THE GOALS OF THE AFFIRMATION PROJECT

From the time I graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1948 until 1976, there was an upsurge of interest in learning about parenting. While information about child development and parenting was available, much of it was written in academic language or from a therapeutic perspective, or was too general to be widely helpful. Telling parents of adolescents to “keep lines of communication open” without suggesting how to do that would be useless advice if parents lack the communication skills or the understanding of child development to know how to keep those lines open.

The goal of the affirmations was to identify easily understood, quotable, positive, invitational messages to support growth at each stage of life.

QUESTION 25.

WHAT THOUGHTS, VALUES AND THEORIES UNDERLY THE DEVELOPMENTAL AFFIRMATIONS?

- The underlying value of the Developmental Affirmations springs from the belief that people need to be encouraged to care for themselves and for others.
- The theory behind the Developmental Affirmations is that people are more encouraged when they are helped to think clearly for themselves than when they are told what to think by someone else.
- The theories of the Developmental Affirmations are grounded in Eric Erickson's concept of psychological developmental stages.
- The thoughts underlying the Developmental Affirmations include ways to share them so they offer both permission and support, hence the careful use of "I" and "You" to indicate who is responsible for what.



You can celebrate the gifts you have received and the gifts you have given.

Integration

DIGGING DEEPER: MORE INFORMATION ABOUT UNDERLYING THOUGHTS, VALUES AND THEORIES.

Background Theories

This question brings us to the giants on whose shoulders we stand. The foundation of this theoretical approach comes from Eric Erickson's work in identifying psychological developmental stages, and for that I am forever grateful. Eric Berne, a student of Eric Erickson, contributed also. Berne's respect for individuals' ability to think for themselves and his dedication to the belief in

peoples' inherent okay-ness helped shape the thrust of the Developmental Affirmations. Berne's how-to of analyzing transactions led to the important "You can," and "I will" permission-giving framework of the affirmations. Gene Cohen, also a student of Erickson, contributed to the thinking about adulthood and old age. Currently, Daniel J Livitin's book, "Successful Aging" reports research that supports looking at the aging brain as a growing and invaluable resource for individuals and for the nation.

More names that pop into awareness are Jean Piaget, Abraham Maslow, Daniel Levinson, George Vaillant, Russel Osnes, Rollo May and the Dalai Lama. I am sure many others contributed important pieces of the theoretical puzzle, and I am grateful to each and every person.

Values & Goals

The values that shape the Developmental Affirmations rest on the theory that people are more empowered when they are helped to think clearly for themselves, than if they are told *what* to think by someone else. The goal of the Developmental Affirmations is to present simple, clear ways to offer ideas, concepts, and permissions in a way that is respectful and does not cause cognitive dissonance, confusion or distress.

Other Theories

Some popular theories about affirmations circle around a belief in empowerment by repetitions. That is, if you just say something enough times, you will come to believe it. Not necessarily true. We have probably all met someone who thinks they are dumb, ugly, or unlovable, but they look really okay to us. But, chances are someone powerful (to them) first ridiculed them in a very emotional way. "You are so dumb! You are ugly. Nobody could love you." Unfortunately, some believed it and embraced it, possibly even to the point of assuming that their life depended on that belief.

These "override" affirmations are designed by another person to counter destructive beliefs. They usually start with "I." The person is told to say, "I am smart and beautiful."

If a person chants, "I am smart and beautiful" five times every night and morning for weeks, that message is supposed to become a new belief. This comes from the brain research that tells us that every time a person says or thinks about something, the brain lays down a small neural track. So, repeat something enough times and you will have a big enough brain track to believe it. It may, in fact, come to feel warm and cozy. However, chances are, when some big stressor occurs, the light blanket of new belief is not strong enough, and the old messages rear their ugly heads, and the person is still not beautiful or smart, and now has failed again. This creates a world of discomfort, resulting in the opposite of the positive effect that was intended.

If, instead, the messages are offered as reminders of possibilities, the person can listen and decide whether it would be in their best interest to accept the new belief. Compare telling a person to say, "I am smart," a directive given by another, with, "I've noticed you have your own kind of smarts; I've seen you ..." Not a directive, but an invitation to reconsider an old belief.

“You” and “I” are carefully used to indicate who is responsible for what. The Developmental Affirmations consist of two segments. Reminders: “You can... (do your part),” and support: “I will ... (do my part).”

About the Reminder Affirmations: the “You can ...” Messages.

The Developmental Affirmations, instead of being directives telling you what to believe or what to think, are reminders of specific inborn human capabilities that we all have that could be helpful at each developmental stage. Persons of faith think of those gifts as God-given. They start with You: “You can ...” which is a reminder that you have the potential for that capability.

Here is a Reminder affirmation example from each stage.



The reminder affirmations can help children become more responsible, so they learn to take good care of themselves and others. Adults use them to empower themselves so they can better achieve their own goals and can strengthen their contributions to their families and the community.

About the Support Affirmations: “I do ...” or the “I will ...” messages.

The Developmental Affirmations also offer support for growth in two ways. First, the nine “love affirmations” offer emotional backing in the form of assurances of support.

Second, many of the Developmental Affirmations offer direct support, such as for the Being stage: “I love you and care for you willingly;” “It’s ok for you to be angry, and I won’t let you hurt yourself or others.” Or implied support, such as for the Doing stage: “I like to watch you initiate and grow and learn.”

Being

I love you
and I care
for you
willingly.

Doing

I love you
when you
are active and
when you
are quiet.

Thinking

You can
become
separate from
me and I will
continue to
love you.

Identity & power

I love
who
you are.

Structure

I love you
even when
we differ;
I love growing
with you.

**Identity, sexuality,
& separation**

My love is
always with
you. I trust
you to ask for
my support.

Interdependence

Your love
matures
and
expands.

These are the thoughts, values, and theories that I recognize. Of course, there may be other values and beliefs so deeply held that I take them for granted and have missed claiming them. If you find some, please let me know.

Dear Readers,

Now the Developmental Affirmations are yours. I hope you live them creatively and always with love. I hope you expand on them. I hope there will be further studies on their effectiveness. You can use the affirmations in any way that is helpful to you, and as a way to help others. You can share them in the straight-forward way they are written, and for some people that is enough. Others will embed or embellish them to fit the situation. Some people use affirmations to help discover more about the developmental tasks of different ages. Other people explore their depths. Some people use them to help heal old wounds. Some of the wounds come from the situations the world presents. I wonder what the wounds and the new strengths from living through a pandemic will be.

Thank you, dear readers, for joining me on the journey of exploring the Developmental Affirmations.

I hope you enjoyed the story and that you will join it.

Go well, and I wish you a good life.

Jean Illsley Clarke

Jean Illsley Clarke, Ph.D., is a certified family life educator and is a widely known developmental parenting educator. Her many books include: “Self-Esteem: A Family Affair,” “Good Heart Parenting,” co-authored “Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children,” and “How Much is Too Much: Raising Likeable, Responsible, Respectful Children — From Toddlers to Teens — In an Age of Overindulgence.” She is a wife, a mother, and a grandmother. She lives in Minnesota.

Appreciations:

If you are among the many people who contributed to the growth of the Developmental

Affirmations story, know that you are deeply appreciated. Especially thanks to Connie Dawson for contributing significant ideas, to Carole Gesme for her steadfast support through the years, and to Betty Cook for her attention to the big picture. Thanks to Lisa Krause for her diligent help in getting the Questions and Answers in place. Thank you to Ellie McCann and Mary Jo Katras, University of Minnesota Extension, for their partnership in raising up this work so that it is accessible to parents, caregivers and practitioners all over the world.

STORIES ABOUT AFFIRMATIONS

Here are some of the responses from friends who were asked to share how they use the Developmental Affirmations:

Nap Time Red Pillows (*Birth to 4-year-olds*)

Hi Jean,

In my preschool, the little ones seemed to like it when they heard a teacher say or sing the affirmations, especially the Being ones (0–6 months set). We decided to find a way to let them get the comfort of those words at any time. We made round red pillows and printed a Being Affirmation on each using a magic marker. The children didn't know how to read yet, but it didn't take long for them to identify which pillow each wanted, especially at naptime.

Kath Hammerseng — Preschool Director — Plymouth, MN

There is Nothing To Do In This Dumb House. (*4-year-old*)

Dear Jean,

On one Thursday, Luke, a usually happy, easy-going, 4-year-old, toppled into being resistant, obstreperous, and irritating. His parents, after about four days of only saying “No” and “Don't do that,” were miserable, and so was he. “We decided what we were saying wasn't helping. We needed other words.” The parents went to the Affirmations for help. They chose, “You can be powerful and ask for help at the same time,” but that wasn't quite right. They played with the words and settled on, “You can use your power to help you make your choices.”

At that point, Luke roared into the room, yelling that there was nothing to do in this dumb house. In a calm voice, Mom said, “Luke, you can use your power to get what you need. You can play with

the Legos, or you can choose something else to do.” His dad echoed the words in a matter-of-fact voice. Luke stopped, stared at them briefly, and went to play with the Legos.

One of the developmental tasks of the 3- to 6-year-old is to learn to exert power to effect relationships. Luke got the guidance he needed and the safe, developmentally appropriate words to help him. His parents learned a new lesson about a 4-year-old’s need for structure.

Marry Paananen — Public Health Nurse — Seattle, WA.

A Transitional Device (Grade school)

Dear Jean,

You asked me to write about how I use the Affirmation ovals in practice. I am happy to do so.

I am a reading and math elementary school intervention teacher for students in the racial and economic gaps. Their lives are often complicated and unpredictable. On days when they enter the classroom appearing unsettled, I lay out the Affirmation ovals and ask them to help me sort and read them. “Read ten and pick five that help you today,” I say. I work alongside, eyes and hands on the ovals, reading aloud and choosing. Within minutes, their energy is restored as the unknown needs are addressed. To the group, if they choose, they read the one that will help them the most for today and slip it in their pocket or shoe. The remaining ovals are returned to their jar and viola! The children’s brains are better able to dive into the work at hand.

Initially, children choose ovals that allow them to belong and feel all their feelings. After a few months, they move on to ovals allowing them to state their needs and advocate for themselves. What could be more powerful than children gaining self-awareness to advocate for themselves?

The Affirmation ovals are simple calming devices. As a transitional device, they frame the children’s minds enabling them to engage in the required tasks that follow. Ultimately, they allow children to move beyond their head noise and take control of what they do have control over — their schoolwork.

Another example:

When I walk into the cafeteria and I find a child in tears or really angry, and neither the child nor anyone around them can tell me why, I invite the upset child to take a break in my office. I eat next to the child with the ovals on the table. Again, we sort and read, and somehow, they land on words that help them name the antecedent to their blow-up. Rarely do I have to say more. They run off to recess and report the rest of their day goes smoothly. It’s as simple as the magic of those affirming words washing over their brain waves.

Much best regards!

Inner-Selfies (Adolescents and Adults)

Hi Jean,

In my “Inner Selfies” ebook, I use affirmations to help the makers of the Inner Selfie paper dolls find nurturing and structuring words and actions that support the development and affirmation of a human being’s creative being and actions.

“In making your Selfie art dolls, you allow yourself to see yourself through art-making. You move into a potentially transformative space of remembering, renewing and reenergizing your ways of being, doing and creating.”

In my book, “The Healing Doll Way,” I write about turning healing intentions into affirmations. I share the Love Affirmations, and a paragraph at the bottom of the page shares ways to use them when making a Loving Kindness healing doll.

Love you

Barb Kobe — Makes Art Dolls, Healing, and Feeling Dolls. She is an Artist, Author, Mentor, Professional Teaching Artist, Certified ARTbundance Creativity Coach. Crystal, MN

Using Affirmations in Parent Education and Therapy Groups (Adolescents and adults)

Dear Jean,

Thanks for the opportunity,

Educating Parents about the psychological and developmental needs of children:

I utilize the Affirmations to teach parents the importance of child development and how each stage of developmental builds on the next. I start by introducing the Affirmations first as positive, supportive statements that parents could say to their child, then I draw their attention to the colors and bring them back to the stage based on the color. For example, the RED Affirmations are BEING statements, etc. I ask the parent to take them home and read them, and then I answer their questions at the next meeting.

This allows me to address the importance of a child’s psychological development. Within each Affirmation is a developmental task the parent can support with their child. Example: DOING

Stage, “I like to watch you initiate and grow and learn.” This identifies the importance of the child being encouraged to learn by exploring their environment and the parent’s role in supporting this process. As we progress, we go through the entire set of Affirmations and all the developmental stages.

Using Affirmations in Group Work:

I have utilized the Affirmations extensively in substance abuse therapy groups. I begin — without explaining anything about the Affirmations — by throwing the large oval (laminated) Affirmations out on the floor and asking each person to choose one affirmation that supports something they did well, and choose another to identify something on which they could improve. When that is done, I have a drop-down poster of the Developmental Stages to explain the stages, and each person can see where the Affirmations they chose are important to their development. I then discuss the idea of recycling and the fact that we all need all the Affirmations as adults. This can be extremely powerful in an Intensive Substance Abuse therapy meeting. I also define Shame. This is often helpful in helping individuals understand what they were seeking and what they missed as children.

CBT — DBT — TF-CBT:

I believe the Developmental Affirmations can be utilized in the process of completing Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) with children who have experienced trauma. The Being Affirmations are helpful in teaching emotional regulation. The Thinking Affirmations are useful in teaching Cognitive Coping. I also find the Identity, Sexuality, Separation Affirmations are useful in the Enhancing Future Safety Module. They are also helpful in teaching the caregiver about child psychological development. By reading the Developmental Affirmations, the child can learn self-care and enhance bonding and attachment with caregivers. They also can be utilized with Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) to support self-soothing and provide an option to rigid thinking and either/or thinking. These evidence-based practices strive to help people achieve psychological flexibility, and the Affirmations can be a beneficial tool in this process.

James Jump LMSW, CAADC, ACSW — Kalamazoo, MI

Look Up at the Ceiling (Young adult)

In a class called “Raising Your Self-Esteem,” a young accountant fidgeted, and shuffled, and sighed, and asked the teacher if he actually believed all this stuff. At the close of the third class, the participant announced she was not coming back, but when the teacher offered her one set of the large plate-size Affirmation Ovals, she took the Red, Being set. She did come to the fourth class. No more fidgeting, but lots more sighing. “What happened?” the teacher’s voice was gentle. “Well, I put those stupid red ovals on my bedroom ceiling and stared at them every day. I began to wish I

had got those messages instead of the abuse I got as a child. I am going to try and believe them now.”

Jean Clarke's observation. — MN

How I Use Affirmations — For Geriatric Support Groups and Church (*Youth and Seniors*)

Dear Jean,

I was first introduced to the Developmental Affirmations at a “Self-Esteem” workshop in 1987. They went to the bottom of a pile of things to read on my desk. I thought they were a bit strange, but once I saw them introduced in a parenting class taught by Kaye Centers, I began to see the value. They became a part of my parenting of my daughter, who lovingly referred to them as “Mom’s self-esteem junk.” Later, when she became a teacher, she requested all that “junk” to use in her classroom.

On a personal level, I have used the affirmations regularly as a part of my self-care. I may choose one and carry it in my pocket, or tape it to a place where I need to see it often. Or, I may choose a grouping of affirmations and tape them to a card that I will use with my daily meditations. At times I’ve chosen one or two to use during a period when I journal, centering what I write around how that affirmation speaks to me, or how I may struggle to hear it, or in some other way that works for me at the time. I have a basket of affirmations on my desk, so they are readily available. Sometimes I just play with them and feel the abundance of love that they represent.

Professionally, because the messages from my own personal use of the affirmations are internalized, they have become central to my work with my clients, who are primarily older adults, or medically frail individuals and their caregivers. The affirmations are part of the language of support that I offer. At times, I will either provide a set of ovals for someone to review, at other times, I will recommend the book “Growing Up Again,” and we will review them there. Sometimes, writing an affirmation on a piece of paper and placing it in a prominent location, such as on the television stand or on a mirror, has been helpful. Other times we may choose one of the affirmations and discuss why that may be difficult to hear, or why it would be important to hear at this time, followed by practicing saying that affirmation to one another. We might also choose other affirmations that could support it, and consider ways to practice them between sessions. With caregivers, especially, I encourage using the affirmations for their own self-care and for imagining ways that they may be able to be affirming of their loved one, who may at times not be affirming of them. Some clients are resistant to utilizing affirmations, and that is always okay, as growing and healing are at their pace, not mine.



In my spiritual life, I have found the affirmations to be a way to connect with God's unconditional love. I recently introduced the affirmations at a "Coffeehouse" worship service in my church on a Sunday morning. The theme for the day was "Renewing our baptisms: claiming God's love." We put affirmations on each of the tables, and then we read them to one another as we circled the room to pass the peace. The youth pastor led the service, and that evening when she entered the youth area, the teens were shouting the affirmations across the room to one another. She noted they were doing this with genuine care for one another.

I find the possibilities for sharing affirmations endless. During the pandemic, while we were "sheltering in place," I offered "Affirmation Hopscotch" to my neighbors while they walked about on a beautiful spring day. It gave me hope, and I pray that others felt some too.

Deborah Search Willoughby — Psychiatric Social Worker in Geriatrics — Kalamazoo, MI

THEORY: AFFIRMATIONS: PHONEY OR REAL?

A few years ago, I started working with cancer patients basing my work on the Simonton approach outlined in their book, "Getting Well Again." One of the important ingredients of the Simontons' work is the use of visualization or imagery where the client is taught to visualize a positive outcome of the treatment and elimination of cancer cells in the body. It was, in essence, the beginning of the repackaging of an older brand of pop-psychology, the power of positive thinking. In the last decade, there has been a massive influx in the market of Self-Healing, Self-Loving, Self-Affirming techniques, using creative visualization and positive affirmations.

From the beginning I had some discomfort with certain aspects of this overall approach. Partly it was due to the evangelical zeal with which this approach was being expounded, but also because many of my clients seemed to develop an almost obsessive need to look and sound positive, no matter what else they were feeling.

The philosophical assumption behind this goes something like this:

We create our experiences by our thoughts and feelings. The thoughts we think and the words we speak create our experiences. We create our experience and our reality. So patients were asked to say things like, "I am healthy. I will have a long life."

Even though they may have felt frightened, doubtful and unconvinced of their chances to increase their life-span, they thought that if they stayed positive enough, hard enough, long enough, their fears would be eliminated. What I saw happening was a developing of a phoney attitude, a scared

child masquerading as an internal positive parent with a strong belief — “I must be positive, or else.”

My knowledge and understanding of Transactional Analysis gave me some understanding of the way ideas and beliefs about the self get incorporated and with this information I was not satisfied with the pop-psychology approach.

It was when I was attending an affirmation workshop with Jean Illsley Clarke that the process for the incorporation of positive beliefs or affirmations about self became clearer to me and in particular the role of the Nurturing Parent and the Free Child. As she began to speak about using affirmations, I found myself inwardly groaning. I imagined the workshop participants adopting the phoney unconvinced child position that I had seen so often in my clients. However, as she read out the affirmations, I noticed a profound difference.

Instead of the person being asked to say “I can trust my inner wisdom,” a partner was asked to tell the person “You can trust your inner wisdom.”

Instead of the individual saying “I love who I am,” a partner was asked to say “I love who you are.”

What a difference. I found myself sitting up and taking notice. The message and the process had excited my Free Child and it made sense to my Little Professor.

Editors Note: Transactional Analysis theory, created by Eric Berne suggests that the way we talk to ourselves and others can be understood more clearly if we think of the personality as having three parts or Ego States: The Parent is the part from which we nurture, structure, criticize, or marshmallow ourselves and others. The Adult is the part from which we do here and now problem solving, taking the environment and ourselves into full account. The Child is the part that responds freely or adaptively. The Free Child responds freely and authentically. The Adaptive Child responds over-compliantly or over-rebelliously or psyches things out like a Little Professor. Using this model, external and internal dialogues can be diagrammed.

So what is the difference and why is the difference so important?

If you now take note of how the message is worded, you will notice that the message is being sent from one person to another or from one part of a person to another part of that person’s self.

I identified the following steps in that process:

1. Message is sent from the Nurturing Parent of one person to the Free Child of the other person. “I love who you are.”
2. Message is received by the Free Child, who feels good.
3. The Little Professor intuitively knows that the message makes sense and accepts it.
4. The message from the Nurturing Parent is thus received by the Free Child, who can incorporate it into the whole self.

5. Having accepted the message from the Child and having integrated it, the person can now nurture self with the same message. "I love who you are."

This process made a lot of sense to me and highlighted the importance of the Nurturing Parent in the process. Instead of a person attempting to convince themselves from their own Child, they were being taken care of by someone else's and their own Nurturing Parent.

Jean then went on to show us different ways to use the messages and you will notice again the use of the Parent in these techniques.

1. Participants find a partner — A selects messages she wants to hear and B conveys the message to A (e.g. "I like the way you initiate things").
2. Participants in groups of threes — A selects messages she wants to hear and B & C convey the messages to her indirectly by saying it to each other about her (e.g. "I like the way she initiates things").
3. Participants in groups of ten — Five people form inner circle, seated. Five participants form outer circle standing behind them. Inner circle participants select message they want to hear. The message is conveyed by each person in the outer circle in turn, so that the message is received from five different Nurturing Parents. Change places and repeat the exercise.

Thanks to Jean Illsley Clarke's different approach to the use of affirmations, I can now work with them comfortably, satisfied from all my ego states that the process makes sense to me.

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Editors Note: People experience affirmations in their own ways. For me the process is as follows: I check my values about the external message in my Parent, evaluate it in my Adult and let my Child listen in. If I choose it as a fitting message for myself, I say it to myself. After I come to believe it in all three Ego States, I find that I spontaneously change the message from "I love who you are" to "I love who I am"!